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THE

WORKS

OF THE

REV. JOHN MACGOWAN:

ILLUSTRATED

WITH A PORTRAIT.

COMPLETE IN TWO VOLUMES:

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LOOKING GLASS,

CONTINUED.

JOSHUA'S PIOUS RESOLUTION;

OR, THE

DUTIES OF FAMILY RELIGION, AND HOUSEHOLD GOVERNMENT, ENFORCED.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
Josh. xxiv. 15.

FAMILY religion is of very ancient, and no less extensive practice; to be traced back as far as the days of our great progenitors, in whose family the God of heaven was worshipped by sacrifice, as is pretty evident from the spoils of the beasts which they wore, as well as from the account we have of the several offerings made by Cain and Abel. From Adam down to Joshua it is easy to trace it in the seed of the promise; but to them it was not confined; for, however misled the ancient pagans were, in respect to the object and modes of their worship, this practice of worshipping God in families was pretty general amongst them, as most writers of antiquity do testify. Homer, both in his Iliad and Odyssey, and Virgil in the Æneid, make mention of household gods held in great veneration by their contemporaries and predecessors; such, I suppose, as those which Rachel stole from her father Laban, and after which he made such grievous lamentation, Gen. xxx. 30. The retaining of Teraphim images and household gods, shews, at least, that household worship was performed by the ancient pagans, and that therefore they had more religion than many who call themselves Christians.

But, however moderns may reject the practice of worshipping God in their families; this good man, this* Jesus

* *Jesus of the Old Testament.* Such is the import of his name, and such the office to which he was called; as the leader or saviour of ancient Israel, by bringing them into Canaan, and appearing at their head in all their enterprises and conquests.

of the Old Testament, resolves and publishes his resolution that the Lord should be served and worshipped in his family. After a recital of God's benefits to Israel, and the wonders which his hand had performed in their behalf, he reasons with them upon the propriety of serving the Lord on one hand, and the danger of rejecting his commandments on the other; may not my reader and me look back and survey the benefits received from the almighty Governor? What evils have been averted by his vigilance, and what deliverances his ever-watchful providence has wrought for us, though undeserving? And on the review we shall be obliged to say, "What hath God done? Is this the manner of man, O Lord?" We may also, without subjecting ourselves to the charge of legality, bring the matter laid before Israel home to ourselves, and ask whether or not we will serve the Lord? And if we will, whether we see it our duty, and are inclined to serve him in our houses with holy Joshua? For my own part, I do not see how church or congregational religion can long subsist, much less flourish, without a due regard being paid to family godliness. And, indeed, it is a rule almost universally observed, that those who neglect the worship of God in their families, are remiss in the duties of social religion, if not enslaved by temptation and sin.

Amongst those who are called Christians, two sets of men fall under the censure of Scripture. 1. Such who totally neglect the service of God in their families. 2. Those who do not altogether neglect this duty, but are irregular and defective in regard to the manner in which it is performed.

I. Those who totally neglect the worship of God in their families, amidst all their pretensions to higher pleasures than others enjoyed. If poor pagans, from the law of nature, considered it as their duty to worship their supreme Creator in their houses; how culpable must they be, who, having the Bible in their hands, and Gospel light shining all around them, neglect to worship him, whose only providence doth make them houses and fix their dwellings in a valley of vision.

But who in a Christian land do neglect the worship of God in their families? One would suppose that there are none such. But common observation shews us, that the

profane herd in general live, in this respect, without God; call not upon him, except to damn themselves and others. Awful prayer! And which, in the issue, may be answered. Many live from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, and even from year to year, without any manner of prayer and devotion at all. Others content themselves with a weekly attendance on public worship, without so much as the smallest traces of religion in their families, or regard paid to God, as the God of the families of Israel.

2. Many of the sensible, polite, and civil, whose external deportment in other respects is lovely, join with the vulgar and profane herd in slighting the God who made them, and class with those who call not upon his venerable name. These are amongst all denominations of people; for both churchmen and dissenters may be found, who live without the fear of God in their hearts, and his worship in their houses.

3. Some are yet, if possible, more inconsistent, and whilst they profess the assurance of faith, and pretend to have no fear of death and futurity, live altogether destitute of family religion and worship. But such people, whoever they are, give but a very slight, if any evidence at all, of the excellency of their faith, or even of its reality. They set a skocking example before their children and servants, instead of training them up in the way they should go; they are to them destroyers instead of nursing-fathers, at whose hands the blood of their uncultivated children will be required in judgment. Such neglecters of family religion and godliness, give all possible reason for us to believe, that their hearts are unsound, and that all their religion is mere hypocrisy. I pity the children of such ungodly parents. I pity the servants whose unhappy lot it is to dwell under their roofs.

Such heads of families are undoubtedly under that awful imprecation, Jer. x. 25. "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, and upon all the families that call not upon thy name." Ranked along with heathens in spite of a lofty profession; exposed to the out-pourings of the divine fury, notwithstanding their pretensions to faith and its assurance. To blunt the edge of this Scripture, some will tell you that they call upon God privately, and so may the other branches of their families; so that they ought not to be ranked along with those who call not on the divine name. But they

ought to know, that if every individual were at one instant of time to call on the name of the Lord, separately and apart, it can with no propriety be called family worship. A family cannot be said to call on the name of the Lord, but in its own proper capacity, in the convention of its members. But a backsliding heart will shelter itself from conviction under any lying refuge whatever, and use the meanest subterfuges.

II. Some there be, who make conscience of the duties of family worship, and dare by no means give them up; who, notwithstanding, are very defective and irregular in the performance and spirit of them. This defect proceeds from hurry of business, or the want of a right plan of household government, rather than from any particular prevalency of an iniquitous or impious principle. And, if I mistake not, ariseth chiefly from the following misconduct.

1. The deferring of morning prayer, till the world has laid hold of the heart, and the business of the day is fairly set in. What disadvantages this alone is attended with, let the man of business, the man of conscience say, for he has experienced it. It were well, if before business is at all begun, this part of duty were embraced as a privilege, and the divine name were invoked early in the morning. This would prevent its being entirely omitted for the day, as sometimes is the case when deferred to a later hour. This would give opportunity to the whole family to assemble, which cannot afterwards be done, without encroaching upon the hours appointed to business; and we frequently find that one or other of the family, in most houses, are absent on that solemn occasion, when late and untimely.

2. Another thing very irregular in family worship is, referring it till late at night, when the body becomes sluggish and sleepy through the fatigues of the day; such a lassitude relaxes the whole frame, that the family may be said to come together to yawn, rather than to worship. Instead of kneeling, they stretch themselves to rest; instead of worshipping God with the heart, they are asleep, or else yawning out their amens. Masters are apt to blame their servants for sneaking privately to bed before family worship is begun, without reflecting, that their own disorder is the cause. And in my judgment, the laborious servant, who must be up in the morning, to do his master's business, is more excusable in going to bed before family worship is

over, than his master is in deferring it till an unseasonable hour. The master and mistress can indulge themselves a little in the morning, which is not the case of servants; and the calls of nature must be obeyed. If masters, therefore, were to study the health, vigour, and activity of their servants, and the dispatch of their own business, they would see their families to rest in an early hour, utterly avoiding all late suppers and unseasonable visitings. How can it be thought that servants, having been up till twelve or one in the morning, can go about their business next day with that vigour and diligence, as if they had enjoyed their natural rest, and been in bed by ten over night. Now,

III. In order to shew the importance and necessity of family religion, I shall point out some things which are to be ascribed to the want and neglect of it.

1. The ignorance of children untaught and unprincipled, left an easy prey to cunning papists, and other ministers of error, who lie in wait to deceive and to lead captive the unwary mind. And none so likely to become a prey as the unhappy young ones, who are destitute of any settled principles. Parents cannot indeed give grace to their offspring; but by acting a consistent part may be of excellent use to them, in leading them externally into the way they should go, according to the divine direction. Many parents have had the pleasure of seeing their endeavours succeed to their utmost wishes, and many children have had reason to bless God for a religious education, under the inspection of their faithful parents.

2. Where family religion is totally neglected, or where worship is performed in a slight unmeaning manner, children and servants are led into contempt of all religion, seeing no traces of its power in the spirits and conduct of their superiors. And can a worse thing be done for young ones in any capacity? If we sincerely sought their final ruin, could we take a more likely way to effect it; seeing children are so very prone to imitate whatever is vicious in their parents? Especially where the parent is under a profession of religion, the case is yet more fatally pernicious; as the young people will be naturally led to conclude, either that the heads of the family are hyprocrites, or that there is, in reality, no weight or importance in religion itself.

3. Church assemblies are disregarded, and church

encouragement is withheld. For the congregation of the faithful in a great measure, under God, depends for supplies upon religious families; which families ought to be considered as nurseries for her special growth. But if the young plantation is entirely neglected; if the children of the godly are not taught to walk in the ways of the Lord externally, what but desolation is likely to befal the vineyard itself? Or what need have parents to be conscientious and circumspect before their children and servants! What need to resolve, through divine grace, with Joshua, that we and our houses will serve the Lord, that their blood be not required at our hands!

Give me leave now, my dear reader, to point out some things which seem to me naturally implied in Joshua's resolution, all of which are requisite to a godly form of household government.

1. It supposeth that Joshua had given, or would give, sound instruction to the various members of his family. For how shall they serve him of whom they have not heard? Him with whose will and law they are altogether unacquainted? The service of God necessarily implies an antecedent knowledge of his will. All service of the divine Being must be according to some certain rule or standard. We know of no rule besides his given word, which parents and masters are commanded to open and expound to their children and servants.

It can never be deemed sufficient, that our children are taught to know our own will; apprentices taught their trades; and servants their proper business: after all these are done, one great lesson still remains to be learned, and that is the law of their God. That of Deut. vi. 6, 7. deserves the attention of all heads of families; "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." What diligence is here required of masters of families, considered under the notion of priests and prophets in the midst of their several households. A similar precept is given, or rather this is repeated in a more concise manner by Paul, the apostle, Eph. vi. 4. "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,

but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." So that if family religion was a duty under the law, it is not less so under the Gospel. To which may be added, that parents and masters, being now under a higher dispensation, have many advantages unknown to the patriarchal age; and the truths of God's gospel, in a more clear and ample manner, than were ever known to the Jewish church.

This divine precept was duly regarded by the faithful of old, who accordingly were careful and vigilant in the instruction of their children and servants, as appears from that in Psal. lxxviii. 2—8. "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter dark sayings of old; which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children shewing to the generation to come, the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, should arise and declare them unto their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." Such was the conduct of the Jewish fathers; how much more ought it to be the study of Christians, who are blessed with such superior advantages.

David, notwithstanding his foreign wars, and the weighty affairs of government which lay heavy upon him, neglected not this part of parental duty, as appears from Solomon's testimony, Prov. iv. 1—5. "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake not you my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words, keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth." So David taught Solomon his son, who, by his subsequent conduct, evidently shewed that instruction had not been administered to him in vain; for, according to the advice of his holy parent, his whole heart was set upon getting

wisdom and understanding. Eunice, mother of Timothy, is highly honoured by the apostolic pen, which records her assiduity in teaching her son, even from a child, the knowledge of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. iii. 15. But alas! the ignorance of many of our children betray the carelessness, and manifest the dishonour of the parents. Thus, it appears, that when Joshua resolves to serve the Lord with his house, that he also resolves to instruct his household in the knowledge of his will whom they serve.

A second thing implied in this resolution is, a purpose properly to exert paternal authority in his family, as under God its immediate governor. He who resolves to serve the Lord with his house, must first determine to command his family. Hence it is required of a bishop or pastor of a church, that he should (1 Tim. iii. 4.) "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity." And if indispensably necessary to that important office, it must certainly be very proper to all masters of families whatever. A man must look exceedingly mean and contemptible, who has not authority sufficient in his own family to command all their attendance upon the worship of God. Though a parent cannot give grace to his children, nor a master to his servant, he may with propriety and justice insist on their presence and decent deportment in the worship of God.

When the master of a family quits the reins of domestic discipline, he introduceth the most fatal disorders into his household, and becomes accessarary to the ruin of his children and dependants. The house of Eli seems to be hung up, as a flag of warning to all future parents, to caution them against loosing the reins of household government. "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;" on which account the severest judgments were inflicted on him and his, 1 Sam. iii. A conscientious regard to this paternal duty, and good conduct in his numerous family, were some of the gems which embellished the character of faithful Abraham. "For I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." Gen. xviii. 19. A remarkable proof of which we have in the case of Eliezer of Damascus, who, although sprung from a Gentile stock, having long sojourned under Abraham's roof, gave the

most illustrious proof of his unfeigned sanctity and fidelity, on his embassy to Mesopotamia. So true is it, that he who from a child bringeth up a servant as he ought to do, shall have him for a son at last.

Three things are to be observed, respecting domestic discipline, as indispensably necessary.

1. It should be begun early; for it is more easy to bend the young and tender sapling, than the sturdy and inflexible oak. Seemingly apposite to my present purpose, I would present my reader with a quotation from a very great master of this subject.* "The great mistake I have observed in people's breeding of their children, has been, that care has not been taken in due season, to make the mind obedient to discipline, and pliant to reason, when at first it was most tender, and most easy to be bowed. Parents, being wisely ordained by nature to love their children, are very apt, if reason watch not that natural affection very warily, to let it run into fondness. They love their little ones, and it is their duty; but they often, with them, cherish their faults too. They must not be crossed forsooth; they must be permitted to have their wills in all things: and by being in their infancy not capable of great vices, the parents think they may safe enough indulge their little irregularities, and make themselves sport with their pretty perverseness, which they think well enough becomes that innocent age.

"The fondling must be taught to strike and call names, must have what he calls for, and do what he pleases. Thus parents, by humouring and cockering them when little, corrupt and vitiate the principles of their children; and wonder afterwards to taste the bitter waters, although they themselves have poisoned the fountain. For when their children are grown up, and these ill habits along with them; when they are now too big to be dandled, and their parents can no longer make use of them as playthings, then they complain that the brats are untoward and perverse; then they are offended to see them wilful, and are troubled with those ill humours which they themselves infused and fomented in them; and then, perhaps too late, would be glad to get out those weeds which their own

* Locke on Education, p. 33, 34. edit. 9.

hands have planted, and which now have taken too deep root to be easily extirpated.

"For he that has been used to have his will in every thing, whilst he was in petticoats, why should we think it strange that he should desire it, and contend for it still, when he is in breeches? Indeed, as he grows towards a man, age shews his faults the more; so that there be few parents then, so blind as not to see them; few so insensible as not to feel the ill effects of their own indulgence. He had the will of his maid before he could speak or go; he had the mastery of his parents ever since he could prattle; and why not now he is stronger and wiser than he was then, why now of a sudden must he be restrained and curbed? Why must he, at seven, fourteen, or twenty years old, lose the privilege which the parents' indulgence till then so largely allowed him? Try it on a dog, a horse, or any other creature, and see whether the ill and rusty tricks they have learned when young, are easy to be mended when they are knit. And yet none of those creatures are half so wilful and proud, or half so desirous to be masters of themselves and others as man."

Continues this very sensible author, page 44. "Those that intend ever to govern their children, should begin it then when they are *very little*, and look that they perfectly comply with their parents' will. Would you have your son obedient to you when past a child? Be sure then to establish the authority of a parent as soon as he is capable of submission, and can understand in whose power he is. If you would have him stand in awe of you, imprint it in his infancy; and as he approaches more to a man, admit him into nearer familiarity with you. So shall you have him your obedient subject whilst a child, and your affectionate friend when he is a man. Methinks they mightily misplace the treatment due to children, who are indulgent and familiar when they are little, but severe to them, and keep them at a distance, when they are grown up. Liberty and indulgence can do no good to children. Their want of judgment makes them stand in need of restraint and discipline. And, on the contrary, imperiousness and severity is but an ill way of treating them when grown up, and have reason of their own to guide them. Parents should

avoid this, unless you have a mind to make your children weary of you, and secretly to say within themselves, *Father, I wish you were dead.*"

It is the opinion of some, and I could almost side with them, that if a child does not learn submission before he is two years of age, it is much if he ever learns it at all; therefore, as Mr. Locke observes, he that would govern his children at all, must begin with the earliest dawn of reason.

2. Discipline should be constantly maintained without relaxation, as well as begun by times. Notwithstanding David well knew this part of paternal duty, it is clear to a demonstration, that his family suffered by his frequently being absent in foreign wars; which, I doubt not, was one principal cause of the disorders he complains of on his death-bed. There should not, at any time, be the least abatement of the parents' authority on one hand, nor of the child's obedience and submission on the other. In the due ties of family religion there ought to be no interruption. Nothing whatever ought to be suffered to break in upon those sacred moments, or to turn aside the duty; as the least neglect on the part of the parent, lessens the importance of the thing itself in the estimation of the child. Children reason upon, and draw conclusions from the conduct of their parents, much sooner, and more striking than most parents are aware of. I knew a man, then in a state of widowhood, who received one of the most severe reproofs he ever met with, from an infant of three years old. Family prayer had been, by some means, neglected on a certain morning, the little child was, as it were, out of his element all the morning; fuzzled about the knee of his father, as if he had something to say that he was afraid to utter. At last, when the family were going to sit down to dinner, this little reprover leaning on his parent's knee, fetched a sigh, and said, *Pa—you were used to go to prayer with us; but you did not to-day.* "No, my dear," said the parent, "I did not." "But, papa, you ought; why did you not?" In short, the father had not a word to reply; and this infant minister's rebuke, was as home, and as effectual, as if it had been administered by the most respectable prelate in the land; and it may be added, I trust, had as permanent an influence.

3. A proper medium between the over-fond and doting

parent on one hand, and the tyrannical governor on the other, ought to be observed. As over-fondness and indulgence have a very baneful influence upon the morals of young ones, so in like manner temerity and severity have their peculiar evils cleaving to them. The lazy, the short and ready way of the tyrant to procure subjection in his children and dependants, by the whip, rod, cane, and ferula, may procure the subjection of a slave, but has not the least tendency to conquer the vicious propensities of young ones. It is possible to make even play itself disagreeable to young ones, and it soon would be so, if every mistake they made was to be punished with a rod; hence it follows, that an undesigned mistake, made by young ones, or any little unhappy accident falling out in their hands, should not even be reproved; or meet with so much as a chiding. The design and spirit of their conduct are the objects of our proper regard, and when these are right, the conduct itself, however faulty, must be passed by. Reproof and correction for what was quite involuntary, and perhaps unavoidable, must produce a timorous dejection and incapacity for business. Besides, giving too much opportunity to the child, to see that the parent, in inflicting of punishment, is not guided by reason but by passion; and that it was not so much the good of the child that was aimed at, as to give scope to revenge and boundless anger, so unbecoming the parent. For this reason a parent ought never to correct a child, but when he has the most perfect command of himself; nor should the least degree of anger ever be discovered, or indeed be felt on the occasion; for if the child has but the notion that you only vent your own anger instead of seeking his good, your whipping labour is altogether lost; and he is hardened instead of being reformed.

The *Scylla* of over fondness, and the *Charbydis* of severity and tyranny, are equally to be guarded against, as equally dangerous to the principles of young ones. The tyrant may gain fear from his dependants, but unhappily their hatred of him arises in an equal proportion to their fear. This is what a wise man would wish by all means possible to avoid; and indeed for a parent to render himself the object of the children's hatred, is something extremely shocking. On the other hand, that parent or master who lays aside his authority, and ceaseth to rule in his own

proper department, becomes the object of just contempt. It is as much the duty of the parent to command, as it is the duty of the child to obey; and so closely is the mutual happiness of each linked, with their acting properly in their different departments, that it is not to be expected, but in an exertion of themselves in parental authority on one hand, and in filial submission on the other. Happy is that parent who is feared because he is beloved, obeyed cheerfully, because of the equity and reasonableness of his commands. Happy is he who has attained Bathsheba's address in tutoring her son Solomon, Prov. xxxi. 2—5. "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel! It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." Here to give force to her injunction, she gives a full scope to maternal tenderness, and addresseth her son as if part of herself. And indeed it appears not that the rod and reproof are likely to give wisdom, unless manifestly influenced by the bowels of parental affection.

3. Joshua's resolution it seems implied, that he was not only the prince of his family, in a way of authoritative command, but their pattern, by way of example; for he puts himself at the head of his house in the worship and service of his God. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Preceptive authority is utterly useless, and in some cases even hurtful, if not enforced by consistent example. If othewise, how readily will our dependants retort upon us, "Physician, heal thyself. Thou that teachest others, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, by breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" And how preposterous! How absurd must our admonition appear, when this is the case! It is something like unto a drunken man rebuking profane swearing.

Parents, and masters of families in general, have need to resolve with that servant of God, Psal. ci. 2. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way: O when wilt thou come unto me (to enable me so to do)? I will walk within my

house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me (lest it should corrupt my household.) I will not know a wicked person (for fear he should be a snare to me.)"

Command, instruction, and even the rod itself, will all be in vain, without a suitable example. Abraham commanded his house, but he led it also by holy example. Abraham will command his house *after him*, to walk in his ways, or to follow his example. How inconsistent would it be for you to command your children to worship God, if you yourself did not lead them in the way. To tell your little ones that they must pray to God, whilst you leave them in the dark, about whether you yourself do actually pray; or, what is the same thing, never pray with them. For if you never pray with your children, they can have no certain proof of your praying for them. Meanness of your abilities is but a sorry excuse for this neglect, for your children are very incompetent judges of them; and moreover, gifts are like the talents of a tradesman, which grow by being used.

Now those who still neglect the worship of God in their houses, and will live without family religion, may indeed number themselves amongst the Redeemer's people, flatter themselves in a *baseless hope, and consider themselves as separated from the world; but the Scriptures rank them along with the heathen, and denounce vengeance against them. Awful it is to feed upon the transient hope of the hypocrite. Awful to cry to our own souls, *Peace, peace*, when in reality the heart is at war with the God of the families of Israel. On the other hand, you who, notwithstanding your many and great discouragements, dare not depart from Joshua's resolution; you who, although frequently humbled under a sense of its imperfections, dare not disuse the worship of God in your families; mean and contemptible as you consider yourselves, the Scripture sets you in a very respectable point of view. The holy Bible ranks you with Daniel, with Moses and Joshua; with Jacob and Noah, with Enoch, and with Abraham the friend of God; yea, with all who, from the beginning, have walked with him in righteousness and true holiness. Ye tread in the

* Baseless, without foundation.

footsteps of those, who through faith and patience now inherit the promised blessing.

Permit me now, in drawing towards a conclusion, to address myself to children and servants. Consider, my young friends, that ye, notwithstanding your green and tender years, are the subjects of reasonable and never-dying souls; souls that must for ever exist in a state unspeakably happy and glorious, or inconceivably wretched and miserable. You are accountable beings, and must be judged according to the deeds done in the body, be they good or evil. Yes, my young reader, you must stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, undergo the strict scrutiny of infinite holiness, and receive your doom from him, who cannot connive at iniquity. How dreadful will your case be then, if not found at the right hand of the Judge! If ranked amongst the reprobate race!

When rising from the bed of death,
O'erwhelm'd with guilt and fear;
You view your Maker face to face,
O how will you appear?

How, indeed! shall you face an offended God? How will you be able to endure the presence of a slighted and contemned Redeemer? How will you bear that dreadful irrevocable sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed," &c.? How will you dwell with everlasting flames? How can you endure unquenchable burnings? Yet these things must be experienced by all who are strangers to the grace of Jesus: by all who die in a state of unbelief and impenitence. It is good, therefore, that you remember your Creator in the days of your youth, and that by times you inquire after the good old way, the only way of salvation.

You may very probably be impatient under the strictness of family government, and be offended with parental reproof; you may conclude that your parents give themselves more trouble about you than is necessary. But let me intreat you a little to consider the obligations they are under, and you will see that they dare not do otherwise than restrain you from evil, and set before you life and immortality, with all its charming attractions, on one hand, and death, with all its gloomy horrors, on the other.

Your parents are particularly entrusted by Providenc

with all your education: and God hath made it their duty to train you up in his nurture and admonition. When you were born into the world, God said unto your parents, "Take these children, and nurse them up for me; and at your hands will I require them;" therefore, if they warn you not against evil; if they reprove you not for, and do what they can to restrain you from sin; yea, if they correct you not for your stubbornness and wilful rebellion, they partake of your sin, and become accessary to your destruction. The spring of that awful ruin which God brought upon the house of Eli, was, "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Happy for him and his family had it been, if he had maintained the authority of a father over his children, and exerted himself as the governor in his family.

It is very reasonable to suppose, that your parents and masters may know more of the vanities and snares of this world than you do, and that therefore your conduct should be in a great measure directed by their discretion. Indeed nothing discovers the maturity of filial wisdom more, than a readiness in the child to submit to the knowledge and authority of the parent. Moreover, God has been pleased to select from all mankind, your parents, as your proper tutors and governors; and consequently, so far as their advice or commands are agreeable with the Scripture, to reject them is the same as to reject God himself. Let the children of religious parents consider the goodness of God to them, in placing them under the direction and government of parents who really seek their everlasting welfare; whose daily care is to bring them to the throne of grace, and solicit covenant blessings for them. To see an Ishmael brought up in the house of Abraham, despising godliness; an Esau educated by Isaac, contemning covenant blessings, hath something more shocking in its appearance, than any thing in the rebellion of others. Let every young reader consider, that if a religious, godly education is not blessed to your conversion and reformation, it cannot fail of making you more the children of Satan than you could have been without it; of aggravating your guilt, and procuring for you more intolerable dungeons in the regions of the damned. But if your parents are happily made the instruments of your conversion; if they are honoured with training you up for God; with what rapturous pleasure,

with what ecstatic joy will you meet them at the coming of the Lord. Then will you bless God for a religious education, and that he graciously put you under the care of those that feared his name. With what unspeakable, transporting delight will they and you spend a vast, an endless eternity, where there is fulness of incomprehensible beatitude, and inexpressible pleasure for evermore!

Bear with me, my reader, whilst I address myself to such members of Gospel churches, if any such there be, who neglect the worship of God in their families, and who may therefore very properly be said to live without God in the world. Your neglect of a practice so commendable is dishonouring to your Maker, and injurious to yourselves and families. You appear, indeed, in the congregation of worshippers on the solemn day, and assume the appearance of Christians; but alas! there is nothing in the family which distinguisheth it from that of the merest pagan. The heads of the family have no communion at the throne of grace, the servants have no example of piety set before them, the children are not trained up in the way they should go; they are left unprincipled, the ready prey of darkness and error. Awful case! if found in the family of a professor of religion.

You will perhaps allege your bashfulness and want of courage in excuse for your neglect. But this is in the highest degree absurd and preposterous. Is it a shame for a needy sinner to bow the knee to the Father of spirits? A shame for the perishing beggar to solicit an alms? This shame is unwarrantable and impious; it betrays a heart turned aside from God to the creature; as it is not the divine presence of which you are ashamed, but the presence of your fellow-mortals. Were it the divine presence of which you were ashamed, you would blush in private the same as in public; and this very shame would issue in your enlargement, rather than in your embarrassment. Your business in prayer is solely with that God who searches the heart of man; with that God who is the Judge of all; consequently your fear of your fellow-creatures is impious in his sight. It is the heart that God requires, and where the heart is lifted up unto him, you may be very easy with regard to the manner in which you express yourselves, as it is not the labour of the lips, but the language of the

heart that meets with divine acceptance. In a word, no excuse whatever, no not even conscious guilt upon the heart, will justify this sinful neglect of family religion. May that God, who is worthy to be praised in all the families of his people, enable my reader and me to resolve with holy Joshua, that we and our houses will serve the Lord!

P. S. The author frankly acknowledgeth, that he is indebted to former writers for some of the foregoing remarks on this important subject.

PEREZ-UZZAH;

OR, THE DANGER OF

INNOVATIONS AND OF DISCORD CONSIDERED.

And when they came to Nachon's thrashing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. *And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error, and there he died by the ark of God.*—2 Sam. vi. 6, 7.

In this chapter, out of which I have chosen the subject matter of the following Essay, we have an account of king David, and his army's bringing up the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been during the reign of his predecessor, in the house of Abinadab. There it had remained from the time of its return out of the land of the Philistines after its capture by them, in that battle so fatal to Israel, when the sons of Eli were slain, and all their hosts either fell by the sword, or were dispersed for the wickedness of the priesthood. Wherever the ark of God was carried in the enemy's land, disease and death were its constant attendants, which convinced even the pagan nations of their impiety and sacrilege, and compelled them to make their offerings to the God of Israel, whose hand was so heavy upon them and upon their gods. To make an atonement, and procure deliverance from the plague, they offered unto God five golden mice, and as many golden emerods, and sent the ark of the covenant back into the land of Israel. Its arrival at Bethshemesh was about the middle of wheat harvest; there it was received with the greatest joy and thankfulness. But its presence was as fatal to the inhabitants as it had been in the land of the Philistines; for of those inhabitants, there fell by the hand of God upwards of fifty thousand, on account of their having dared, contrary to the law, to look into the ark, and

behold its contents so inviolably sacred. They therefore sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, requesting them to come down to Bethshemesh, and bring up the ark into their city. With pious care the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim fulfilled their request, and brought up the ark of God, and put it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, where it remained till its present removal. With solemn pomp king David, that pious prince, attended by thirty thousand chosen men, besides a prodigious concourse of people, out of all the tribes of Israel, conducted the sacred ark upon a new carriage, from the house of Abinadab, amidst the shouts of triumph, and the voice of music.

But it was not long before all his rejoicing was turned into sorrow and lamentation; for as they had began wrong in acting contrary to the law, one mistake leading on to another, they escaped not without some tokens of the divine displeasure; which had doubtless been avoided, had the law of the Lord respecting the ark been properly observed. Passing through the thrashing-floor of Nachon, whether from smelling the corn, and desire of feeding, or from some other cause, the intractable animals walked carelessly and stumbled, as they are said to have done, 1 Chron. xiii. 9. This stumbling of the oxen shook the ark upon the cart, and seemingly endangered its falling; to prevent which, Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, put forth his hand, and laid hold on it. This act of unseasonable and unwarrantable zeal, being an affront of that Deity represented by the ark, awoke the jealousy of heaven, and brought upon him instant judgment, and death premature. As in this account there wanteth not difficulties, of which the cavillers at revealed religion have sufficiently availed themselves, and with which, some virtuous and undesigning minds have been puzzled, I shall,

1. Clear the account of every thing difficult in it, and then,

2. Shall apply it practically to Gospel purposes.

I. Then to clear up the difficulties attending this narrative, be it observed, that the

1st. arises from a comparison of this passage, with its parallel in 1 Chron. xiii. 9. In the text the place is called Nachon's thrashing-floor, and in the parallel it is called the thrashing-floor of Chidon; which some have attempted

to account for by supposing, that the thrashing-floor spoken of might belong to two different owners, whose names were Nachon and Chidon; and that the one text names the floor by one of its owners, and the other text by his partner. Others, upon grounds more warrantable, from Jewish records, affirm that Chidon was the name of the place where the thrashing-floor was made, and that its owner was called Nachon. And it is as probable, that this place might be called the thrashing-floor of Chidon, as that Sarah's grave should be called the cave of Machpelah, especially as the word signifies a place rather than a person. But, take it in which view we will, there is no contradiction, and indeed very little difficulty. He must be fond of cavilling who, from this circumstance, finds occasion for infidelity to display its talents. But the

2nd. and greatest difficulty is that judicial and sudden breach made upon Uzzah, from whence the place takes the name of Perez-uzzah: by giving the text but a cursory reading, the sons of infidelity may seem to have got something to prey upon at the expense of revelation; but I trust, that upon a close attention to the subject, the divine character shall go unimpeached, and revelation retain its full and unshaken evidence. These are somewhat like to the ideas that suggest themselves first, upon a cursory reading of the words; "The ark of the Lord was a sacred emblem of the divine presence; this sacred emblem had been by the hands of the enemy carried out of the land of Israel, and had been dishonoured and polluted within the domains of infidelity; wonderfully redeemed from a pagan land, and arrived within the borders of Israel, the congregation of the Lord go down, solemnly to conduct it to the most honourable residence, and rejoice exceedingly that it is once more in their possession: so great their joy, that their principal concern seems to have been the safety of this sacred emblem. It seemed to be in danger as passing through the thrashing-floor, and a pious regard for its safety induced a young man, who had left his father's house for its protection, to put forth his hand and lay hold on it to secure it from falling; and for this cause he is instantly struck dead by the hand of God, whose goodness is unto all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works."

This paraphrase on the words is as favourable to infi-

delity as can be wished, even by the most sanguine of her votaries; but favourable as it may seem, I trust it shall appear, that every censure of revelation built upon it is like a castle built in the air, a fabric without a foundation. I shall for once attempt to vindicate to man this part of the divine conduct, and trust to shew its equity and propriety. In order to which, observe in general that every part of this transaction with whatever piety and zeal it was conducted, was injudicious, unwarrantable, and directly against the well-known law of God, which they were instructed in from their infancy.

1. They put it upon a cart, which was contrary to the law given in Numb. vii. 9. "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear it upon their shoulders." Also Numb. iv. 15. Here was therefore an unlawful step taken in putting it at all on a cart, notwithstanding new; seeing it was contrary to the very letter of the law, and a step which very likely was taken at the advice of Abinadab, on the hill, or Uzzah his son, who fell by the ark of the covenant.

2. The service of the ark, and the tabernacle appertained to the Kohathites only, and a stranger might not approach unto it under pain of instant death, Numb. iii. 10. "And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death;" compared with v. 38. where the same threatening is denounced against the stranger who would dare to approach those sacred emblems of the divine presence. But here is one, who does not so much as appear to have been a Levite, much less a Kohathite, and less still of the sons of Aaron, adventuring to do that which was unlawful for even the Kohathites or the sons of Aaron to have done; shall it then be thought strange that he dies for his presumption? For,

3. Even the Kohathites might not touch the ark, under pain of death; but carry it by the staves of shittim-wood upon their shoulders, notwithstanding they were chosen and sanctified to its daily service; and shall it be thought that a common Israelite should take the ark in his arms, contrary to the law, under the notion of its better preservation, and escape with impunity, whilst the jealous God of the

ark was a present witness of the impious transaction? Inflicting instant death upon the son of Abinadab, for his unhallowed and unlawful care, was therefore every way consistent with the given law, which he ought to have been acquainted with. Was it necessary that God should give an account of his ways to man; there is yet another thing, which might be, and indeed which most generally is, adduced in defence of this act of justice inflicted upon Uzzah. I mean,

4. His unbelief and mistrust of God's protecting of the ark in its tottering state. The God of Israel had preserved the ark of his covenant, whilst in the hand of his enemies, and made its presence terrible to the heathens even in the house of their gods. The hardened Philistines were not able to do it injury, though fully in their possession; and now it tottered as passing over the thrashing-floor of a friendly Israelite, the youthful Uzzah could not leave it to divine protection. Here was undoubtedly a visible distrust of the providence of God, added to all the former impiety specified in the foregoing particulars, the whole amounting to the fullest justification of the ways of God; and fertile of useful lessons to us, who profess to be worshippers of the same Being, through his anointed son Jesus, our common way of access unto his seat of grace and mercy.

From these things specified we are taught, that if God requires to be worshipped in one way and manner, we can never be justified, nay, we can never be safe in worshipping him in another. If God, by his Spirit in the word, has commanded all nations to be taught, and then baptized, we cannot be justified in our inverting the institution, by baptizing first, and teaching afterwards: or if he has ordained believers only as the proper subjects of baptism, how shall we be safe in administering it to infants, who are incapable of present faith? Or if God has ordained the said ordinance to be administered by dipping, how will sprinkling be justified or held lawful? Again, if God has indeed laid the model of his churches upon a congregational plan, how can he approve of our building national establishments unto him? Every act of worship that has not a Bible warrant, how specious and pious soever it may seem, is in itself unlawful, and to be ranked along with superstition, will-worship, and antichristianism. And of

every such worshipper it may be asked, "Who hath required this at your hands?"

We farther learn from the premises, that no man, or set of men whatever, have any authority to change the ordinance of God, how convenient soever the alteration may seem; and therefore that change, which by universal consent the ordinance of baptism has undergone, must in itself be profane, unlawful, and impious. It appeared to our councils, that sprinkling a little water on the face was more convenient, and less dangerous than dipping the whole body into that element. But as to the danger of dipping, the universal practice of cold-bathing, in order to strengthen the solids, evidently shews, there is none to be apprehended; and as to the conveniency attending sprinkling, I shall only say, that it appeared to king David and his nobles, to Abinadab and the whole congragation of Israel, that the ark could be more conveniently carried upon a cart, than upon the shoulders of men by its staves; and that the sons of Abinadab could take as good care of it as the Kohathites could have done; yet the issue shews the disapprobation of the Almighty. This disapprobation arose not from any want of solemnity in the change introduced, for pious regard was had to the holiness of the ark, and care taken that the carriage appointed to bear it, should never have been polluted by application to common uses. It was quite new, and had never been applied to any other use at all, but from its first construction devoted to the service of the ark, so that the displeasure of the Lord arose not from the circumstances attending the change of the ordinance, but from the thing itself; as a departure from the given law, and a compliance with the conduct of the Philistines, who were the first that put the ark of the Lord upon a cart; and were justifiable in so doing, being ignorant of the law of God, respecting that and the tabernacle.

They knew not the master's will, and therefore could not be expected to do it; but the Israelites, who had the law in their hands, deserved to be beaten with many stripes, because they departed from it, and followed the invention of ignorant Philistines. How far this case is analogous to those among Protestants, who know and believe, that baptism was originally administered by immersion, unto believers only, and yet practise the contrary, is very easy to

discern; and what their reward for so doing is likely to be, may be gathered from the conduct of God upon the occasion referred to in our text.

It appeared to Uzzah, that being a hale, strong, young man, whilst the oxen walked so unevenly, and exposed the ark to the danger of falling, that he could carry it in his arms with greater safety, and equal speed; so that here was no lack of zeal for God, no desire to spare himself from toil, no want of care about the ark of the covenant; and yet he is stricken dead by the immediate hand of God, for exerting himself for God, in a manner by the law forbidden. How careful should we be, that our worship is not only fervent and devout, but agreeable to divine institution! Seeing God will have no strange fire kindled on his altar; no unhallowed hand to touch the ark of his covenant. His will is plain, that the wayfaring man may read it; and therefore ignorance will only tend to aggravate the guilt of every one who worships him according to the inventions and traditions of men. Let us beware, that we stand not chargeable with making the divine commandment void, by following our own inventions, or the traditions of our forefathers.

Farther, we are taught, that however tottering we may apprehend the state of the ark to be, it will be unsafe to take any measures for its safety, besides such as are prescribed in the sacred records. Much we are indebted to wisdom, discretion, and prudence, in the management of common concerns in life; but they can never supersede the the plain injunctions of unerring truth, nor attempt to preside in matters appertaining to the tabernacle of our God. Here the law of the Lord only is our only rule, and his heavenly Spirit the only guide, upon whose assistance we may depend with safety. To allege, that the discipline of a Gospel church is left in any wise to the discretion of men, independent on the direction of God's word, is not only a giving up the cause of religion, into the hands of its most notorious enemies the papists, but a tacit reproach upon the Scriptures; as in themselves, though in the hand of the Holy Ghost, insufficient to direct in matters of practice. It might therefore have been wished that a late writer had been more guarded in his body of divinity; for if once it can be shewn, that the Scriptures are an insufficient rule to

dictate our practice, it will require uncommon sagacity to prove them a sufficient rule of faith; as in my humble opinion, the same arguments which militate against the former, are equally strong against the latter. I trust I shall be pardoned if I should say, that the need there appears to some of human discretion sometimes taking the reins of church government into her own hand, does not arise from any deficiency in the Scripture rule, but from our inattention to, or ignorance of it; for the more we shall make the New Testament the object of our study, the more clearly shall we be convinced of its having made ample provision for every part of the Christian's practice, in every station and in every connexion. And I could be willing to lose my reputation for life, to be able to say something that might have a tendency to lead the followers of the blessed Jesus to honour his word as their only, their all-sufficient rule of obedience, as well as believing; which I am certain is not the case at present with those, whose conduct is in a great measure influenced by their own prejudices, or by the practice of our present sister churches, or the practice of our predecessors in the same church.

Nothing has, nothing can have a more direct tendency to strengthen the hands of infidelity, and to weaken those of Christianity, than an inattention in our conduct to Bible dictates, unless it may be alleged, that the word of God has not made full provision for Christian direction in every case whatever.

Were I a votary for the foolish scheme of deism, and were to hear a zealous defender of Gospel truths to own, that the Scripture has left many things respecting the conduct of a Gospel church undetermined, I should avail myself more of such a concession, than of all the seeming difficulties in the volume of inspiration; and should at once conclude, that if it is deficient in any one article, it cannot be the word of God, whose ways and works are all perfect. Preachers and writers should therefore sit down, and weigh with seriousness the effect, which their doctrine is likely to have upon Christianity in general, and not rashly expose the Scripture to the censuse of infidels, in order to promote the facility of any measure whatever. Having endeavoured to shew, that the judicial death of Uzzah was perfectly consistent with the threatenings of the law, and likewise touch-

ed upon the instruction it affords us, I shall now attempt to amplify the subject, by applying it to Gospel purposes; which was the

II. Thing proposed; here I shall consider it in a typical view; a figure of good things to come. And

First, The ark itself, which is generally understood, with all its sacred contents, to be typical of the person and Gospel of Jesus Christ our blessed Redeemer. And in many respects is answerable, as

1. It was the more immediate dwelling of the Deity among the Israelites; on it the glory of his presence appeared; from it he spake to Moses, and gave forth his oracles to the people; and in like manner Jesus the man in God, is the residence of the fulness of the Godhead, which is manifested in the flesh of the Virgin's son, from whom, and by whom, the whole mind of God is spoken unto fallen man.

2. By the motion of the ark, the movements and journies of the Israelites were directed; when it moved, they moved; where it led, they followed; when it halted, they stood still. So Jesus Christ is the only leader, as well as commander of his church and people; "My sheep hear my voice," saith he, "and they follow me." Where he leads, they follow; nor may they follow any besides him; therefore it is said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Let the dead bury their dead, follow thou me." The same precious Redeemer, who saves by his blood, doth also, by his guidance and teaching, conduct the feet of his people in the way of his steps, as the great prophet of the church and bishop of immortal souls.

3. Every obstruction was removed out of the way of the Israelites on the approach of the ark. Jordan was divided, the walls of Jericho fell flat to the ground before it, and Dagon was demolished in its presence; even so the adorable Immanuel is the all-powerful breaker, who goes up before his people, and the Lord God on the head of them, at whose presence every hill becomes a plain, every valley is exalted, crooked places are made straight, and rough places smooth. The strong holds of Satan's kingdom give way, fall down before his sacred presence in the ministry, and by him the Dagon of antichrist is brought to confu-

sion. Add to what is said, that after the ark had long travelled in the wilderness, and Canaan, a place of rest, was prepared for it, into which it entered with triumph: and so it was with our blessed Redeemer, who having. as the sinner's substitute, in the days of his flesh wrought out a perfect and complete salvation, by finishing sin, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness, he entered into his own glorious rest, and also took possession of that to which his people are appointed.

4. The treasure preserved in the ark, was also typical of the fulness of the Redeemer. The law was put into the ark, which figures to the church the perfect obedience of Jesus unto the legal covenant, and its no longer having power to curse and condemn those who are sprinkled with the blood of atonement. Whilst the law lies enclosed in the ark, its voice must be from the mercy-seat, and therefore the voice of justification and pardon. The golden pot of manna preserved in the ark, doth also shadow forth Christ in his word and ordinances, as the true bread, the bread of life, the bread of God which came down from heaven, and the only food which can nourish up the soul unto eternal life.

The rod of Aaron which budded, blossomed, and brought forth fruit, is also a beautiful and lively type of Christ, preached to the conversion of sinners, and edification of the saints. This was reserved as a testimony against those who refused to submit to the government of God, and of Moses his servant: so shall the usefulness of a Gospel ministry, at the great day, bear testimony against those, who, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, go about to establish their own righteousness, and will not submit to the Redeemer's great salvation.

The cherubim on each hand of the mercy-seat looking towards the ark, represented the holy angels, ministering unto Christ in his church, and prying into the mysteries of his incarnation and redemption; and from Christ in his church, learning subjection to him in the capacity of Mediator; the refusal of which is thought by some, to have been the ruin of the whole race of fallen angels.

Secondly, The Kohathites were especially appointed to the service of the ark, and commanded to carry it upon their shoulders by the staves pertaining to it; typical of

those whom God hath chosen to preach the Gospel of his son Jesus to the children of men, and according to divine institution are set apart in his church to the ministry of his holy ordinances. They are to bear the ark of the covenant before the congregation, and lift up the Saviour of sinners by the preaching of the Gospel, for the salvation of guilty mankind, ruined and undone. But in the case before us, as hath been observed already, the original institution had been departed from, and the ark was drawn by oxen on a carriage. Yet even here those animals made use of were such as under the law, in divers cases, were figures of Gospel ministers, extraordinary and ordinary. The twelve brazen oxen which stood under, and supported the brazen sea, in the temple of Solomon, seem to have been typical of the twelve apostles, by whose ministry and doctrine the whole of the Gospel dispensation is upheld. The brazen oxen looked to every quarter of the world; and as for the apostles, their sounds went to all the earth, and their united voice to the ends of the world. Gospel ministers in ordinary were prefigured by the oxen which trod out the corn for the food of the people, and so applied by the great apostle of the Gentiles. To shew the propriety of such application, it may be proper a little to consider the analogy between the type and antitype. To this purpose be it observed,

1. That the ox, especially that which treadeth out the corn, is a beast of labour, and toils for the good of others; in like manner Gospel ministers are very far from having an easy station in the church of God, and they know but little of the hardships and toil attending the calling of a minister, who consider his life as a life of pleasure and idleness. Yet it is not strange, that people should thus mistake concerning ministers in general, seeing so many assume that name and office, merely for the sake of gain, and feed high upon the perquisites of the altar, without officiating in its service. These are strangers to intent application in study, as well as to zealous, laborious preaching. But that man who is laid under a necessity to preach the Gospel, and is by the love of Christ constrained to seek the salvation of lost sinners, will find his hands so full of employment, that no part of his time can be devoted to

idleness. He will findin himself a deceitful heart, that must be studied, the better to learn the avenues by which conviction may reach the hearts of those to whom he preaches: such conflicts between his own flesh and spirit; such struggles between the law in his members, and the law in his mind, as will command his frequent attention, that so by them he may better learn how to speak a word in season to the weary and heavy laden. So heavy shall be the weight of the body of death upon him, that he shall well know what holy Paul experienced, when so pathetically he exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" This self-study, added to his diligent search and contemplation of the Scriptures; his necessity of knowing the state of his people, the better to conduct his ministrations, and the natural care he finds himself under for the welfare of the whole, will make his life sufficiently laborious. And indeed his observation must be scanty, who does not see the constitutions of faithful ministers sooner broken, and their health more early impaired, than those of the blacksmith or ploughman, whose employments are of the most laborious nature.

2. The ox is an animal by nature formed strong, and fit for his service to mankind. So is he, who is prepared by grace for the ministry of the Gospel. The foundation of his useful talents is laid in the natural endowments of his mind, which are not implanted, only improved by learning and grace. Strength of judgment, clearness of discernment, soundness of reasoning, and keenness of penetration, are gifts of nature, which, when sanctified by grace, are a foundation for the most useful qualities, and are notwithstanding conspicuous enough in some men, who are strangers to God and the grace that is in Jesus. But the true strength of the Christian minister lies in his being brought to a sense of his insufficiency, of himself, to do any thing as it ought to be done. When made sensible that he can do nothing, he is brought to depend entirely upon the grace that is in Christ, from which he obtains strength equal to his day of either trial or labour; and finds to his confirming experience, that when he is in himself weak and incapable, he can do all things through Christ strengthening of him. Thus being brought off from the sandy

foundation of self-dependance, he is strong in the Lord, in whose name he goes forth; and by the power of the Redeemer's might, meets with such support as is oftentimes astonishing even to himself; when out of weakness he is made strong, waxing valiant in fight, turning to flight the armies of opposition.

3. Patience in labour is another thing in which the analogy holds between the type and antitype. The patient ox bears the goad of the (sometimes unskilful) driver with quietness, and goes on, for the most part, with steady steps in his opening the furrows of the earth, or in treading out the corn; laboriously providing bread for him by whose hand he is smitten. Gospel ministers shall find, that they also have need of patience, in order to do the will of God their master, as they shall be sure to meet with a variety of trials to exercise their faith and every virtue. In this world they shall have their full share of those tribulations, which are common unto all who are chosen of God out of its snares, and from amongst its inhabitants. Many family troubles and personal afflictions also shall assault them, in order to teach them compassion and sympathy; besides the weighty concerns and cares of the churches, that shall fall upon them daily. Amidst all the difficulties he has to struggle with, the Gospel minister shall find that those very people whom he bears upon his heart before God, will not always administer comfort to him, but rather add afflictions to his bands; for it is not uncommon for those who shall be his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord, to be as a crown of thorns to him whilst in this state of separation and sorrow. He shall have certain proof that the Lord's people are neither all perfect nor yet in one mind with respect to himself and his ministrations. If he is a doctrinal preacher, he may find those who want to have more practical divinity preached to them, notwithstanding it is antichristian practice that is not built upon a doctrinal foundation. If he is a practical preacher, and enforceth the duties of the Christian life, some others will want more evangelical motives than he may have happened to use. Or, if his study be to mix doctrinal, experimental, and practical divinity in his discourses, he may find that it is not exactly agreeable to the taste of some person, rather more curious than his neighbours, who, merely because he urgeth

not duty upon the old covenant plan of rewards and punishments, shall go near to treat him as an antinomian. Yea, it is even possible, that in the course of his ministry, he may find mere babes in grace, young in knowledge, and weak in every Christian attainment, dissatisfied with any food but what is proper for the strongest believer only, and those who scarcely know the right hand from the left, setting up for critics in theology. If he is weak in body, or depressed in spirit, so that he cannot preach with his usual vivacity, or as might be wished, it is possible that, instead of sympathy and comfort, he may have reproof administered to him; for all his hearers are not competent judges of his feelings. These, with an almost numberless train of other things, will require the patience of an ox in him who would be a useful Gospel minister.

III. The thrashing-floor on which the ark was exposed to seeming danger, was also no insignificant figure of the Gospel church. It was separated from the common fields, and so is the church from the world; it was prepared for the purposes of thrashing, winnowing, and preparing the grain for human sustenance; the church also is prepared for the ministration of the word and ordinances, where Israelites indeed received the bread of their souls, the bread of the kingdom.

Yet we read not of the ark having been shaken on the cart any where, except upon this thrashing-floor of Nachon. It is indeed awful, yet it is true as it is awful, that the ark of God meets with no such shakes as within the thrashing-floor of the professing church, and that Jesus receiveth no wounds so painful as those inflicted by his avowed friends. All the atheists and deists, all the pagans, Turks, and papists in the whole world, could do little against the Redeemer's interest, did his own professing people but walk steadily, as having the ark of God in charge. Neither is it the more loose and unregarded part of professors, who have it in their power to shake the ark. If it is at all shaken, it must be by the stumbling of those who are most intimately united in the same yoke, and nearest unto the ark itself. More mischief has been done to religion by the ambition, self-will, and obstinacy of its warm votaries, than by all the immorality and profaneness detected amongst professors. Yet a man may be an ambitious Diotrephian,

loving to have the pre-eminence, and lording it over hi brethren, and yet continue in church-fellowship, not only without censure, but have his self-will borne with, and his obstinacy indulged; at the same time another man shall be separated from communion, on his being detected of any overt-act of immorality.

These little foxes, which are connived at in our vineyard, devour and destroy more of our tender grapes, than all the lions and wild boars of Amana and Shenir, or indeed in all the forest of Lebanon.* Hence such is the deplorable declension of religion in our day, and such the ignorance of its genuine spirit, abounding among us, even where doctrinal speculation most obtains, that it is very common to hear such descriptions of characters as the following: "He is a good man, but very proud, and cannot bear to be thought wrong in any particular. He is a gracious man, but he is a dear lover of money. He is a very religious man, but unforgiving in his temper." An alarming, an awful description of any man, much more so of any professor; but truly shocking, if given of a minister of the meek and forgiving Saviour. However, although people may flatter themselves, because of their enlightened judgment, that they are in a state of grace, notwithstanding the predominancy of these vicious passions over them; and others may do what they can to foster up their self-adulation, I shall still be bold enough to assert, in public and private, from the pulpit and the press, that, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" even if the strength of his reasoning powers were as strong as Samson's brawny arm, and his belief were as orthodox as the faith of Satan. In our day, that charge brought by Jesus against the Pharisees, seems very applicable to some believing churches, "They stumble at gnats, and swallow camels;" as might be shewn in a variety of respects, were it deemed immediately necessary. But I proceed to the

Fourth observation, which is the cause of the ark's having tottered upon the cart; "for the oxen shook it." These words seem very plain, and in themselves easy of

* It is not drunkenness or whoredom, or any external abomination, that endanger the peace of a Gospel church. These are evils which, when detected, are easily expelled, because all are agreed that they ought not to be tolerated. One Pharisee is able to do more mischief than fifty atrocious offenders, and all the while deeming himself the only righteous man in the community.

explanation: but it is possible to perplex the plainest text, and that sometimes without any intention so to do: and plain as this is, I find it not a little embarrassed in a note by a certain very learned and justly celebrated commentator; whose words are, "By their stumbling the cart was shaken, and the ark upon it, and in danger of falling, as Uzzah thought; or the *oxen shook*, for the word *it* is a supplement; they shook as if their members were plucking asunder and parting, as Kimchi expresses it, because of the holiness of the ark; as if they were sensible that it was wrong for them to draw it, when it ought to have been carried on the shoulders of the Levites; and by this way, as well as by the death of Uzzah, the error committed was pointed out: but others render it, for the oxen stuck in the clay, and could not go on; which Uzzah observing, and fearing that in their struggle to get out, the cart should be overturned, and the procession retarded too much, took hold of the ark to take it out, and carry it the remainder of the way, it not being far from Jerusalem." Such is the sense which this truly learned divine, after consulting Kimchi, Noldius, and other rabbins, gives us of the text, but which I cannot fall in with; and shall shew the reasons for my dissent, after having noted a small inaccuracy which I find in this and the following note; and which enemies to the truth might be glad to wrest into a contradiction, though in reality it is not so. What I refer to is, what the author says respecting the oxen being conscious that it was wrong for them to draw it, when it ought to have been carried on the shoulders of Levites; and what is said in the note on the following verse, "he touched it with his hand, which none but priests might do, supposing him to be a Levite, which it is not clear he was, however, not a Kohathite." Now all the difficulty lies in this distinction, between the Levites and the Kohathites; a distinction necessary to be observed, seeing it appears not that Levites in general might approach the ark any more than the rest of the tribes, but only the sons of Kohath; those who were chosen and appointed to that particular service. The confounding therefore of the Levites and Kohathites is certainly an inaccuracy in the notes referred to, and the sense would have been clearer if otherwise expressed; but there is no contradiction in it, inasmuch as all the Koha-

thites were descended of Levi, although all the Levites were not descended of Kohath; wherefore all the Kohathites were indeed Levites, notwithstanding all the Levites were not Kohathites.

That the holiness of the ark should affect the oxen with dread, so as to make them shake as if they were tearing piecemeal, cannot readily be given into, seeing we have but little proof of the devotion of animals of the brutal rank. Popish legendaries, indeed, inform us of fishes attending to a good sermon, and of even asses worshipping the host: but as often as we read or hear such stories, we treat them with contempt; and how this notion of Kimchi, quoted by our author, deserves any treatment, does not at present to me appear. It is every whit as difficult to account for it, how these same oxen should become acquainted with its being the province of the Levites to carry it upon their shoulders, or to account for their shaking with terror, for having broken that law which they were never under. Nor can I agree with the sense quoted from Noldius, it being every whit as unlikely, though not altogether so absolutely ridiculous. That they should stick fast in the clay, so as not to be able easily to disentangle themselves, seems very ill to agree with a thrashing-floor, which may be supposed to have been more firm, in order to preserve the grain from being trodden into the earth.

Let the ground be ever so solid and even, it is not unnatural to suppose, that coming through a place where very probably was plenty of corn, or at least where corn had lately been, its smell might excite in them a desire of feeding, and of course cause them to turn aside, as they might be drawn by the scent of food. Yea, from such a desire after the corn, they might become so intractable and unruly, as might endanger the ark. Probably a ploughman, who best understands the nature of these cattle, will prefer this sense to the other; he knows them capable of that keen sensation of hunger, but has very little reason to speak of their devotion. I can see no reason for rejecting a sense, which naturally occurs from the order and fitness of things, and embracing that which is forced and unnatural; and less still for having recourse to mystery, where there can be no manner of need for it, as in the case before us.

The thrashing-floor being accommodated to the church,

and the oxen understood as an emblem of ministers, it will perhaps appear, that in our floor the oxen may sometimes stumble, or walk unruly, so as to make the ark apparently to shake upon the cart. Even in public exercises, where several ministers are engaged one after another, it is possible, that there may sometimes be as great an inequality of the yoke, as if a husbandman were to plough with an ox and an ass together, and such a jarring in the sentiments delivered, as must necessarily tend to perplex and confuse the ideas of the audience. Solomon hints at the impossibility of even two walking together without disorder, who are not in general agreed: but in more modern times, it may happen from one cause or other, that preachers of an opposite cast may be linked together in the same yoke, and unite in the same exercises, to the astonishment of some of their hearers. And really, where this is the case, it appears to me to proceed from a species of civility, that cannot be justified by any stated law whatever. Should ministers, strictly Calvinistical in their sentiments, sit patiently and hear a preacher undervalue the Saviour of sinners, by preaching up a way of salvation which they know to be directly opposite to that revealed in the Gospel of Christ; and after all, cordially join again with preachers of the same doctrines, again in return of the exercise: the more ignorant part of the people would necessarily be exposed to embarrassing temptations, and from thence be led to question those ministers' zeal for the doctrines which they themselves deliver, especially if it occurs to their minds, that primitive Christians would not, in their day, have bidden God speed to the preachers of a Gospel that degrades the blessed Jesus, and wreathes the laurel for the brow of legal pride. Yea, who can tell but some precious souls might, from this mixture of ministers of opposite sentiments, in the same public exercises, be led to question the reality of religion itself? And certainly it would greatly tend to confirm the enemies of revelation in their infidelity.

Such discord has been known in some such exercises, that the minister who prayed, has absolutely contradicted and unpreached what had just been delivered, under the notion of a Gospel sermon. How unseemly! How inconsistent with the unity of Christian faith, must this unseasonable jarring be! Is it not something like to bullocks

tied in the same yoke, each choosing a different way, and pulling and jostling each his fellow? Is it any thing strange that youg Uzzahs, who have but little acquaintance with him who sustains the government of the churches, should be tempted to think the ark in imminent danger, and so give it an unhallowed touch when this is the case?

Farther, it is possible that this discord, which may happen between the preacher and them who pray upon the occasion, may be productive of fresh stumbling among the rest of the brethren. Should a man, who is actually under a deep sense of creature nothingness, and at the same time is grieved to see the only foundation of the sinner's hope neglected in the ministry, have the mortification of being called to pray after a free-will sermon has been preached, it may give occasion to misapprehension in the rest. They cannot be perfect judges of his feelings, and therefore may deem his jarring with the sermon in his prayer, to be the effect of ill-judged temerity, rather than a conscious zeal for the Redeemer's honour. And thus one ox, having stumbled upon the thrashing-floor, shall occasion disorder amongst all who draw in the same yoke with him.

Far it be from me, however, to despise any, because they are not exactly of my sentiments. No, I would honour them as gentlemen and scholars; I would esteem them as men of virtue and religion, so far as they give evidence of it. But I would have none to join together in the same exercises, who cannot have a hearty spiritual fellowship with one another. In such mixed companies there must be bonds and shackles on either side, and consequently the leading design of such institutions is entirely lost.

It does not often happen, that all ministers in the same connexion do exactly think and speak alike; though it is a general rule, that every individual considers himself to be in the right, and of course deems those who differ from him to be so far erroneous. Sometimes, indeed, you may meet with a minister, who has candour enough to believe, that others may be really sound in their faith, and may bid fair for usefulness in the ministry, notwithstanding they do not in every thing exactly agree with the sentiments which he hath espoused. But then, which is more than a counterbalance for this, you may find others, who are very angry with you, will represent you as a heretic and dangerous

person; and however quietly and inoffensive you may study to live, shall retain an implacable hatred, and as far as their influence goes, will stir up persecution against you, if you are unhappy enough to differ from them in some particular articles, and those too, which perhaps neither angels nor men ever were intended perfectly to understand.*

When one ox thus jostles and horns his neighbour, who may happen to be yoked with him, and when the latter really finds himself to be gored in his reputation and usefulness, or in his spirit, he is naturally led to a critical examination of that temper and conduct from whence the hurt proceeded. On inquiry, he finds the whole to be as opposite to the spirit and conduct of Christ, as darkness is to light, and is led to treat such a one, who has thus injured him, as one whose acquaintance with religion is only speculative; and thus, if grace prevent not, plunges himself into the same error of spirit which he contemns and abhors in others. For it is very rare, in our day, that you shall meet with a man, who, if you smite him on the one cheek, will turn to you the other also, without returning the ungenerous compliment.

Shall I dare to recommend it to those ministers, who can carry it in a manner so unchristianly to one another, merely on account of some abstruse point in theology, to consider that well known and almost as little regarded rule of our blessed Lord and Master, where he commands us, "to do to others the same things that we would wish them to do unto us;" seriously to lay their hands upon their hearts, and ask their own consciences, how they will be able to answer their cruel and unbecoming treatment of each other, when they appear at the bar of God, who is no respecter of persons; and where it shall be seen, that to have possessed the meek, lowly spirit of Christ, and studied to honour him by doing his works, will be some of the best evidences that shall appear in our favour.

It will be in vain to plead a sound faith, an orthodox judgment, and a burning zeal for God, unless these excellencies proceed from a sanctified heart, which will always appear to be a meek and forgiving, a lowly and loving heart. We may cry, Lord, Lord, as loud as the roaring

* This ought not to be applied to any individual, as but too many instances of this spirit may be produced, as abounding in many places.

of a lion, in a way of profession and speculation, and after all, unless the fruits of the Spirit are found in us, we shall be banished from his amiable presence for ever. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, &c. Now, if instead of these there is hatred, discord, rashness, cruelty, and ill-nature, what evidence can be given of our Christianity? An angel's knowledge, joined with Paul's elocution and zeal, will not prove a man's conversion to God, if these are wanting. And it is lamentable to think, how far the public ministry of late years, has been calculated to neglect the spirit and practice of Christianity, and to do little more than inculate orthodoxy in sentiments. But if the Scriptures are the standing rule of God's conduct towards the human race, many professors, both preachers and hearers, may find themselves in a deplorable situation another day, when admonition will be unseasonable.

Will the spirit of the Gospel admit of people quarrelling with, and persecuting one another, about how the divine Father begot his Son Jesus, so that he is indeed believed in as the only-begotten of the Father, distinct from him in personality, and every way equal to him in all divine perfections and prerogatives; the all-sufficient and only Saviour of lost and ruined sinners? Whether the elect were chosen under or above the consideration of the fall, so that the eternity of the decree of election is most stedfastly believed? Whether the elect of God were from everlasting considered as just in their new covenant head, or a judicial act passes upon them, when by grace they close in with the Saviour; whilst we are agreed, that justification is entirely by the grace of God, through the obedience of our adorable substitute? Whether God created the souls of all men within the first six days, and infuseth them into the fœtus about the fourth month of gestation, or the whole man is procreated by generation? Whether the saints in glory are acquainted with human affairs or not, &c. &c. I am fully persuaded, that puzzling and perplexing the church with such useless disputes, will never be able to gain the divine approbation, nor yet the approbation of actors themselves, upon a retrospective view of their assiduous zeal.

Again; there is apt to be some considerable jarring between old and young ministers, like the stumbling of oxen,

which made the ark to shake upon the cart. It does not always happen, that length of days is a sweetner of the temper, or that hoary hairs are an evident token of an humble heart; therefore you may sometimes find men of age and reputation, apprehensive that much is due to them, merely on account of their long standing in the ministry, well remembering, that hoary hairs are a crown of honour, if found in the way of righteousness. Even they, alas! are found to be but imperfect men; for it is not enough that the veneration due to advanced years is paid to their persons, but every transaction must be directed as they would have it; and if their inclination is thwarted in any instance, that thwarting is construed into an opposition to them as individuals. But it may so fall out, that a man, who has not been of quite so long a standing in the ministry, and whose hair is not in the least like to a venerable gray, may have vanity enough to consider himself as a self-conscious being, and consequently assume the right of thinking and judging for himself; and therefore cannot be led where his seniors may think proper, or act according to their opinions in all things. They and their advocates may plead age and usefulness; he will reply, old age is not always in all things wise, neither is usefulness confined to hoary hairs. They may plead prior usage and ancient custom; he will allege, that all antiquity is not to be deemed canonical, nor her documents implicitly to be embraced as authentic.

And what is likely to be the issue, if a man should dare to act according to the best understanding he hath of the Scriptures, and look on himself as accountable for his conduct to none on earth, besides that church to whom he is a servant? Why, in all probability, he would be accounted a man of a bad spirit, disrespectful to his brethren, and an enemy to the public interest. He should soon see the resentment of his seniors in their distant behaviour; and whether they might be faithful enough to represent his conduct to himself, as dangerous to the cause, or not, their private reflections on him, behind his back, would be carefully whispered in his ear. He is but a man, and according to their notion, a man but of an indifferent spirit; and therefore it might naturally be expected, that a rooted disgust at their spirit and conduct may be bred in his mind, and that he may deem distance and independence essential to

his comfort and usefulness. It must be owned, that all connections which gender bondage, and prevent a man exerting himself, as he thinks most for the public good, are hurtful in themselves. What good can arise from a connection, where a man dares not be free to speak his mind, having had proof sufficient, that if a word is spoken not universally agreeable, however it may seem to pass unnoticed for the present, he shall afterwards hear of its having been improved to his disadvantage, and that too by seniors, with whom wisdom ought to dwell.

I cannot help concluding, that if ever the ark does totter upon the cart, it is one way or other by the stumbling of the oxen; I therefore wish, that Gospel churches would assert their own independency, and not suffer the reins of government to pass out of their own hands, where the Scriptures of truth have wisely placed them.

Whatever jarring obtain among ministers, and whatever evils from thence result, remember this, ye churches, the guilt of all will lie at your door, as from you they do originally proceed. Let your minister be ever so wise and prudent, he is as much your servant as your ruler, and as much bound to abide by your determinations, when dictated by the word of God, as you are to abide by his, when under the same direction. But if you leave it for your minister, because of his superior knowledge, and being more conversant with divine things than yourselves, to judge for you what is right or wrong in church discipline; hold up your hands to confirm his determination, rather than to express any conviction of your own minds, you not only debase yourselves as Christians, but greatly injure your minister, and dishonour the Lord Jesus. You injure your minister, both by imposing more upon him than you ought; inuring him to rule and determine all things at home, so that he expects the same submission abroad that he finds amongst you, and thereby is unfitted for any society but your own. You dishonour the Lord Jesus, in neglecting to seek and know the Scripture rule for yourselves, and judging and determining cases accordingly. It is the glory of Christ in his church, and not the glory of Christ in the minister, that is aimed at in the discipline of his house, where every member, man and woman, is called to sit in judgment as well as the minister, and is as much interested in the determination.

It hath been observed by many, that the more the management of a church is left to a minister, the more ignorant that minister commonly is of the subject; as I think is most evident in that chapter on Discipline, in the third volume of a late body of Divinity. The reason is obvious: all their determinations passing without difficulty or opposition, they are not laid under the necessity of searching so much into the mind of Christ in the Scriptures. But when a church takes the management of affairs upon itself, the minister will sometimes find his opinion controverted, which will stir him up to a closer examination of the word, and of course make him more master of the subject. We may thence see how much Christ's ordinances are calculated to promote human industry, in both ministers and people, if attended to in their simplicity; and how far it is the duty of all professors to study the mind of Jesus in the word for themselves, that they may act from conviction, rather than from respect to the judgment of others.

SOME THOUGHTS

ON

OCCASIONAL PRAYER.

Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.—James v. 13.

Of all the duties of the Christian life, there is none of more excellent use to the believer himself than prayer, as God in his ordinary way bestows his benefits in that appointed channel of our asking, according to our great Teacher, whose dictates are infallible. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened," Matt. vii. 7, 8. Prayer in a peculiar manner tends to shew forth our faith in, and dependance upon the Lord, as the original Author of nature, and supreme Governor of the moral world; the God of grace and of providence. By prayer we practically acknowledge him as the supporter of our frame, the giver and maintainer of health, peace, and liberty; the spring of our felicity, and fountain of all enjoyments. In a word, by prayer we acknowledge him as our God in covenant relation, and our adorable Father who is in heaven.

It is a privilege, from which no outward circumstances can possibly debar us, and from which the threatenings of enemies can by no means deter. Business on the Exchange, or labour in the field; journeying, or even being joined with company of what kind soever, cannot hinder the elevation of a praying heart to God. From the bed of sickness; from the noisome dungeon, the ardent petition ascends to the throne of God, with as much velocity as from the assemblies of his people. Although our feet should be made fast in the stocks: although our limbs should be fettered with chains of iron, and we shut up in the innermost prison, the privilege of prayer cannot be

withheld. You may be denied the other privileges of God's house; the word itself may be wrested from your hands, but all your enemies cannot debar you from the publican's privilege of calling upon God. For were they, as has been the case of our predecessors, even to deprive us of the main organ of speech, the heart, though denied the use of a tongue, can speak perfectly intelligibly before the throne of grace, and will be regarded when it puts in its claim to mercy.

It is a duty incumbent on all who stand in need of the divine assistance in any sense. And I think it will never be denied to be the duty of a hungry person to ask for bread, or one that is athirst, to implore that which only can satisfy the keen sensation. Surely the fool ought to seek after wisdom profitable to direct, and the condemned criminal may lawfully solicit pardon. He that is ready to faint may warrantably cry out for strength, and he that is perishing, for mercy with the publican; but where there is no sense of disease and misery, there can be no breathings after God in prayer; no crying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me a miserable sinner." A sense of sin, wretchedness, and necessity, being the foundation of all spiritual prayer, it is a sufficient warrant for prayer wherever it prevails. So that it is needless to ask, "Will God hear such an unworthy sinner as me?" If necessitous, the Scriptures encourage us to ask, and assure us, that in so doing we shall receive.

It is an exercise always seasonable, because we are always needy sinners. Never more seasonable, than when a vessel of mercy is cast down among the refining pots of affliction. Some we shall find in that calamitous situation, whilst there is a call for God to sit in Zion as a refiner, thoroughly to purge his people from their tin and dross; and this will be requisite, till such time as all his people are made pure, even as he himself is pure. "If any man is afflicted, let him pray." As affliction is the season of greatest necessity; a season which will the most put nature's fortitude to the trial, and which therefore most loudly calls for heavenly assistance; for the favourable and merciful regards of our divine Father, and everlasting friend; if any man is afflicted, let him pray. *Any man*, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, whatever have been the criminal

aggravations of his former enormities; however destitute he may find himself of qualities to recommend him to divine acceptance, let him pray.

When any particular change has passed upon a family; when it has been laid under any train of circumstances, of a calamitous nature, it has been the laudable custom of some to call the officers of the church together, jointly to seek God in behalf of the family. A custom, well agreeing with our professed dependance upon our Maker for all things; at whose hand we receive all the good, and all the evil together blended, in our chequered lots; and with our belief in him, as the only governor of the natural and moral worlds. A custom well agreeing with our connexion with each other as Christians and members of the same society; the institution of which seems to have been solely with a view to our mutual advantage, and the better assisting each other in the day of difficulty and distress.* It appears from the nature of our connexions, as members of the same body, to be the duty of every *church member*, when under either the frowns of divine providence, or the hidings of the Redeemer's face, in any way peculiarly distressing, not only to make known his afflictions, whatever they may be, to the church with whom he is united, that they may have the Christian privilege of sharing in his sorrow, and assisting by their prayers, even if incapable of yielding other assistance.

Farther, from the nature of the same connexion, as well as the direction of the apostle James, chap. v. 14. it appears, that every member of a Gospel church, whether man or woman, has an indubitable right and power to call the officers of the church together, to pray with and for them. That no circumstances, how affluent soever, elevate a man above the necessity of this as a duty. No circumstances, however mean and penurious, can debar them from it as a privilege. Were people therefore found in the exercise of it more, we should undoubtedly see more of the glory of Jesus in church institutions. I should sincerely rejoice

* Nothing can be more certain, than that our righteousness and goodness extendeth not unto God. Being perfect in every attribute, he can receive no addition to his essential glory and felicity by any service of his creatures whatever. Therefore the benevolent design of his institutions must be the good of his workmanship. Gospel institutions are amazingly calculated to promote the good of society, when embraced in their native simplicity.

to see this part of Christian fellowship revived amongst us, and its use become as in ancient days. We, as a church, have had a very recent instance of the Lord's regard to his own institutions in the case of a much esteemed sister, who, when taken with a very dangerous disorder, which threatened her speedy dissolution; under felt darkness of soul, and the severest buffetings of Satan and unbelief, she earnestly longed for, and solicited the officers of the church to come and pray with her, fully persuaded that the Lord would hear their prayers, and should either restore her speedily or clear up her evidences of interest, and give resignation to his will. It was unto her according to her faith: prayer was made; she was immediately delivered from her temptations, blessed with a peace, which passed all understanding, and kept at the feet of Jesus, in a lowly submission for many days, notwithstanding in the greatest bodily affliction. This, I trust, will be the means of encouraging others, to go and do so likewise, thus to claim their privileges as members of the church of Jesus.

Something that bears a kind of resemblance to this, is in use with some, who, upon particular occasions, invite a few friends to join with them in prayer or praise, as the occasion may direct. Even this I could wish to see more generally encouraged, notwithstanding I am convinced, it comes exceedingly short of the original institution, and is by no means equivalent to the designs of church establishment. How great would be our privilege, to be able to lay our distresses before our whole community! And what a spirit of prayer would be stirred up on such occasions! What wonders of divine interposition would we see, were we but capable of embracing our own mercy, in that relation in which we stand to each other!

How affectionate and warm would our mutual regard for each other be, when thus led to taste the sweets of Gospel communion, and become acquainted with the divine conduct towards each other, in grace and in providence? Indeed, there is not a bare possibility of our reaping the benefits natural to our Christian connexions, without this mutual reciprocal knowledge of, and communion with, each other, in all our affairs outward and inward. That injunction of Paul's, Gal. vi. 2. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," necessarily supposeth a

knowledge of one another's burdens; for how can a church bear those burdens with which it is altogether unacquainted? how shall the distresses and difficulties of individuals become our common burden as a church, unless care is taken to make them known to us in that capacity?

No man may warrantably say, "My distresses are of such a peculiar nature, that revealing them, and especially to a whole society, would be likely to do more hurt than good;" seeing God hath graciously bound himself by covenant engagements, to hear and answer the prayers of his assembled church.* This being the case, the poorest member is capable of assisting you; perhaps more by his prayers, than the richest friend in whom you may choose to confide, can do by his purse or advice. I know but of two things that can debar the church from this privilege, which is the very essence of Gospel communion. *Shame* and *Pride* are the great enemies which rob us of our comfort and privilege.

Shame forbids us to reveal any thing which may tend to reflect upon either our wisdom or piety. Or if we at all reveal our distress, *shame* will direct us to do it in such a disguised manner, that very often its true springs shall lie concealed. But is it any particular shame for a man, that is always complaining of the wretched treachery of his heart, to own that he is sometimes misled by its deceitfulness? It would argue uncommon wisdom indeed, for him to have such a deceitful and vicious heart to cope with every day, and yet have the happiness to escape all its snares on all occasions. We should certainly act much more in character, if, instead of artfully concealing what we think not fit to be published, we conscientiously confessed our faults one to another that we might be healed.

* I am aware, that a very formidable objection will here suggest itself, and it will be "deemed of dangerous consequence, to trust a whole society with our most private concerns; to put even our reputation as men, as tradesmen, and Christians, entirely into the power of such a numerous body as a Gospel church may happen to consist of." In answer to so plausible and strong objection, I would have my reader observe, that this objection supposeth that church fellowship, if attended to in its fullest latitude, tends to the prejudice instead of the benefit of individuals; which is, I think, what can by no means be admitted. Moreover, there can be no possibility of danger, but from a gossiping spirit, divulging abroad what is communicated in church assemblies. But this apparent danger ought not to deter us from a privilege so great, and at the same time so obvious. On the contrary, it points out another duty now greatly neglected, and which, if attended to, would produce the most salutary effects in every Gospel church. I mean, to extirpate that gossiping spirit so very pernicious, and which ought by no means to be suffered in Christian society.

This is the divine appointment, James v. 16. an observance of which would open such a door to sweet fellowship and pleasurable communion, as is unknown in modern churches: of whom it may be truly said, that they have little more than the bare externals of church order and discipline among them, without the vital spirit and essence.

Pride also will prove even a more stubborn enemy than shame, its *kinsman*. Pride can never allow that its affairs ought to be subject to common inspection; and concludes, that it is better to bear its distresses alone, than to reveal their real cause, which may, perhaps, reflect but little honour on the party concerned. This confirms me more in the belief, that church members ought to confess their faults one to another, not only when the faults have been detected, but as soon as possible after they have been committed; as soon as the heart begins to be wounded under a private sense of them. Every ordinance of Christ tends to mortify the pride of man, and to promote Christian love and affection; this, perhaps, more than any whatever: this which is almost, this which is entirely neglected. This conscientiously confessing of our faults voluntarily having been so long in disuse, it is no wonder at all, that formality and distance from God and each other, have become so awfully predominant.

But let my reader consider, that if your distresses are lawful in themselves and their sources, you can have no reasonable objection to communicating of them to the church. If they are unlawful, either in themselves, or in their sources, it is your duty, it is your privilege to lay them before the church, that by means of the church's prayers, you may be healed according to the promise. So that at all events you must be considered as sinning against the church, and as sinning against your own mercies, whilst you are deterred either by pride or shame; or, as they are falsely called, *prudence*, from imparting your distresses, whatever they be, to the church to which you belong. O God, for thine own sake, restore unto thy churches the genuine spirit of primitive Christianity.

When personal or family distresses have been revealed; when prayer has been requested, and friends have come together for that purpose, it has been known, that the occasion has been less profitable than it might have been, by an

unaccountable wandering from the point to which they were called to attend. In some cases, when domestic calamities were desired to be deprecated, it has been known that much time has been spent in prayer, and the case itself, on account of which prayer was requested, has been either wholly omitted, or at most but very slightly touched upon; to the real addition of further sorrow to the sufferers.

In some cases, the speaker for the company has gone through the state of all mankind by nature, and lamented their ruin—The plan of redemption by Christ, admired its perfection, and the fulness of its blessings—The incapacity of man to do any thing to entitle him to that salvation—The work of the Holy Ghost upon the mind in regeneration and conversion—The great decay of vital religion in general, and the lamentable corruption of some communities in particular—The encouragements and discouragements of Gospel ministers—The state of the nation—The badness of the times, from the corruption of great men and oppression of the poor—Lamented the irreligion of all ranks and degrees of men—Gone through the political state of Europe—The abominations of Antichrist—And the estate of the Turkish and Pagan nations, and every other common place subject of prayer. These things, with many more, have been run through in a way of prayer, in the presence of a poor distressed brother, whose personal case has scarcely been mentioned, notwithstanding at his instance prayer was requested.

This I consider as an evil of extensive prevalence; an evil that in a great measure frustrates the design of occasional prayer; an evil therefore which should be guarded against, as we would wish well to religious society. In order to contribute my mite towards rectifying this disorder, which I consider not as beyond a remedy; and as a disorder that must strike every one, who has had an opportunity of being witness to it, in a disagreeable light, I would observe, that,

If the church to which we belong appoints a season of extraordinary prayer, the occasion will be laid before you at a previous meeting; that which is the occasion of the appointment will be expected to be the object of your attention, if you should be called to activity in the exercise.

If called by the church to be their mouth unto God, be

you assured, that they do not desire you should wander from sea to sea, through all the quarters of the habitable world in your prayer; but that you shall attend principally, if not only, to the subject recommended as the object of that day's concern.

The case is the same, when you are called to pray with an individual, or with a family in distress. You may rest satisfied, that a poor prisoner confined to a bed of sickness, or a family under the weight of domestic calamity, do not want to hear any thing about the political concerns of the nations; neither can the situation of either the true or false churches, make any deep impression upon a heart overcharged with grief. Therefore he cannot cordially join with you in such circumstances, when you wander so far from his own particular case. For when you are belabouring the man of sin, the Romish antichrist, your poor friend is mourning the antichrist within him. Whilst you are bewailing the great declensions of religion, and the deplorable situation of the church, he is bewailing that iniquity of his own, which has drawn forth the scourge of God in such a singular * manner upon him. Whilst you are deprecating the evils that you see, or think you see, threatening a guilty land, he is groaning under the pressure of personal or domestic calamities; perhaps trembling to think what may be the issue of the sad dispensation.

Thus there is a palpable dissonance between the party praying, and the party for whom prayer was to have been offered.

From what has been said, permit me to inquire into the cause of this neglect, or inattention to the particular case which you are called to remember. It appears to me, to proceed from either a mistaken zeal for the public good—a fondness to display our own abilities—or an unjustifiable absence of thought, inconsistent with the solemnity of prayer.

1. A mistaken or untimely zeal for the public good may be the cause. I call it mistaken or untimely zeal, for a true well regulated zeal will find opportunities enough to bring every public case before the throne of God, without unseasonably lugging them in on those opportunities devoted to

* Singular; most commonly it appears so, to the afflicted party himself, though it is not so in reality.

particular purposes. In private, in his closet, in his family, or even in ordinary church meetings, he may enlarge upon every circumstance in the religious, or in the political world, as he shall find freedom, without being deemed culpable. But all particular appointments ought to be held sacred to that, for which they are appointed; therefore every one engaged ought to consider himself as under certain restraints, from the nature of the opportunity.

2. A secret fondness for displaying our own religious talents, may sometimes lead us aside from the proper object; and being called upon to attend to one particular subject of prayer, we may take occasion, with much verbosity, to enlarge upon every common place article of prayer. But is it not highly unbecoming for us to encourage pride, and give licence to ambition, even in the presence of our Maker? If we ask a favour at the hand of a fellow-creature, would we take occasion, at the same time, to shew him with what persuasive eloquence we could solicit every other favour at his hand? This fondness of displaying our own talents is altogether inconsistent with the confessions which we frequently, and perhaps even then make of our own meanness, nothingness, and incapacity for all spiritual duty. Is it not in the highest degree preposterous and absurd, to confess to God that we know not how to pray as we ought, unless his Holy Spirit help our infirmities, and make intercession for us; and at the same time to let him see how well we can pray without the Spirit's assistance? I say, without the Spirit's assistance; for the Spirit of God is a Spirit of order, and suggests only necessary prayer. He hath no hand at all in the manifestation of our great capacity for voluble prayer. His province is to prepare the heart with matter, rather than to fill the lips with words. Hence the Spirit's prayer is represented as uttered in groans, rather than well constructed, easy flowing sentences.

Besides, all enlargement upon things foreign to the occasion is so far from discovering extensive abilities, that, on the contrary, it betrays a want of understanding, and a mind not duly affected with the solemnity, and rather tends to distress than edify the hearers. Solomon's words, Eccl. v. 3. "A fool's voice is known by the multitude of his words," are not inapplicable to our purpose; for, by how

much the more we exceed in words, by so much the less do we recommend our judgment. It would even seem, that this divine writer had such a case in his eye, when he gives this caution, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be *few*. For a fool's voice is known by the multitude of his words," Eccl. v. 2, 3. Of the same import is that general direction concerning prayer, given by the great Prophet of the church, Matth. vi. 7, 8. "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them."

3. This little attention that sometimes is paid to particular cases, may proceed from absence of thought, which is as unjustifiable as displaying our own abilities. What excuse can be offered for such inattention, when we consider that prayer in general is, our address to the King of kings, whose prerogative it is to search the hearts, and try the reins of all the children of men; and as such is the most perfect judge of the concord or disagreement between our hearts and lips; between our feelings and expressions. Were we addressing an earthly monarch, who is but a worm like ourselves, would we not be careful to avoid wandering from the point; would we not study to express our petition in a manner the most pertinent of which we are capable? Suppose then for instance we were soliciting pardon for some condemned malefactor; would we entertain his majesty with a tedious account of the several states of Europe, before we came to the matter of the intended petition? Certainly not. We would in such a case confine ourselves to the matter of our petition, which we would endeavour to couch in languge the most persuasive, and enforce by arguments the most engaging. Surely then, all our intercourse with the God of the kings of the earth, is of such a solemn nature, that it demands the attention of the whole soul, and a special regard to the matter of our present petition, with which we approach the throne of infinite holiness.

Now to draw to a conclusion, one general rule respecting prayer may be laid down, out of which some things useful as a directory may be drawn. I mean the nature of true prayer: and it is *the language of the heart*. Much prayer

may be made, where no voice is heard. Many words may be used where the heart is destitute of the spirit of prayer, and not one spiritual desire ascends towards the throne of God. Therefore it behoves every man and woman to consider, that as to avoid numerous particulars, all prayer may be defined under these three heads; confession, petition, and thanksgiving; these are to be regulated by the present disposition of the heart, and what you have learned in past experiences.

1. *Confession* must and certainly will be, as far as you are influenced by the Spirit of God, regulated and directed by that sense which you have of the sin and misery which you confess. To exceed this, or in other words, to express with our lips that of which our hearts possess no feeling, cannot be understood otherwise, than as a mockery of that divine being who is the object of prayer. It is impossible to pray spiritually without self-examination, and due regard had to the sensations of the heart.

2. All *petition* is to be directed on the one hand by your necessities, or the necessities of others for whom you pray; and on the other, by the belief which you have in Christ's ability and willingness to save. To ask bread when you are not hungry, or water when you are neither thirsty nor sensible of pollution; to ask for clothing when you see not your own nakedness; or for quickening influence, when you are no way apprehensive of your deadness, would be inconsistent with that sincerity which you profess. And equally inconsistent it would be for you to bewail the afflictions of a distressed friend, and in words to solicit his deliverance, if in reality your heart is unaffected with his distress and captivity. To act uprightly before God, the eye must never lose sight of the heart, for, as the heart is, so will thy prayer be, spiritual or carnal.

If you are hungry, you may ask bread; if your hunger is violent, you may urge your petition with the greatest vehemence, and even use an holy violence upon God, like the famous wrestler. If the keen sensations of hunger, thirst, &c. prevail, you will not readily be diverted from the object of your pursuit; spiritual hunger must feed upon the bread of God, and thirst must drink of the water of life. If the distresses of your brethren lie heavy on your heart, you may follow the example of the Syrophenician woman,

Matth. xv. 21—28. in whose history we have a noble example of prayer, and a memorable instance of its powerful prevalence.——She was a woman of Canaan, a member of an uncircumcised community, to whom the Gospel of salvation was not as yet preached. Though a Pagan by descent and education, she was no stranger to the humane feelings of a parent, but sought to Jesus for the relief of her daughter. The divinely compassionate Redeemer heard her petitions, and felt the force of her overcoming faith, yet answered her not a word, because he would draw forth her belief into a more extensive exercise, place her in a more exalted point of view in the annals of his kingdom, and hold her up in Zion as a fit example for his people to follow. Though he answered her not a word, she desisted not, but prosecuted her suit with much vehemence, crying after him to the disturbance of his disciples. Still she meets with a very discouraging reception, and is plainly told, that the Saviour's present mission is not to any gentile nation; but "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Surely she will now give up all hope, and cease from further solicitation! No, she will not yield. She came for mercy, and mercy she will have, or die by the feet of Jesus. Her prayer is now short indeed, but it is warm and pithy: *Lord, help me*, is all her cry. Yet even this prevails not, for an immediate propitious answer. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." What shall she do now? What can she have further to hope for? Deemed a dog by him who is used to perform such wonders of mercy. She confesseth herself a dog, allows the children's claim, and humbly petitions only the dog's portion, the crumbs which the children scatter from their table. Now she prevails. Jesus can constrain himself no longer; the disguise of unkindness sits uneasy upon the loving Redeemer. His yearning bowels must have vent; his divine compassions must be discovered. And now his seeming anger is turned away, he speaks delight and comfort to her. Like this poor woman for her daughter, you may plead for your friend till you obtain a favourable answer, and see his deliverance accomplished. It may therefore be said, Go ye and do so likewise.

3. All thanksgiving ought to be directed by the sense, which we really have of the goodness of God in benefits

received at his hand. To thank God for mercies which have made no impression on our hearts, is nothing short of flattering the Most High, and crying, Lord, Lord, with the detestable hypocrite; and it is very awful to play the hypocrite with our Maker. In all cases then, it appears that the Christian who would act consistently wih himself, and would guard against the leaven of hypocrisy, must be much conversant daily with his own heart, as well as with the volume of Revelation. Do we bless God for his unspeakable gift, Jesus, the Son of his love? Let us look well to the nature and measure of the hope we have in him; and the ardour of our desire after an interest in his great salvation, and the unbounded blessings of his grace and love. If we express our thankfulness for the providential benefits, let us see how far we are sensible of the government being on his shoulders, and of every benefit of life being the fruit of his munificence; how far we see his hand exerted even in our common enjoyments; for without suitable impressions on the heart, our verbal confessions dwindle into the sacrifices of fools, and as such must be an abomination. But where the heart is under proper impressions, there needs not many words, nor language much refined, to render our addresses acceptable to him that sitteth upon the throne; it being the heart only upon which his regard is fixed; the heart which he demands in all our religious exercises, and which ought never to be left behind in our approaches to the throne of our Maker.

THE

LIFE OF JOSEPH,

THE

SON OF ISRAEL,

IN EIGHT BOOKS:

CHIEFLY DESIGNED

TO ALLURE YOUNG MINDS TO A LOVE

OF THE

SACRED SCRIPTURES.

PREFACE.

When a new book is ushered into the world, if it has the happiness either to please or displease, there is great inquiry made after the author: and as I think it would be a pity to forbid the world this pleasing itch of inquiry, I forbear putting my name* to the Life of Joseph, till such time as this curiosity hath in some measure spent itself. Yet not to leave the reader altogether in the dark about who and what the author is, I shall give him a negative or two.

1. He is not then a writer who cannot err; for he thinks it possible for him now and then to be guilty of mistakes, in sentiment as well as literature. Consequently,

2. He is none of that class whose *ipse dixet* is the pure standard of orthodoxy. But he has one thing to say for himself, which will weigh a great deal with people of sense and candour; and that is, that the Life of Joseph is wrote as well as he could do it; for could he have done it better, he had never sent it into the world as it is: for it was not wrested from him by force, neither got out of his hands by clandestine means; by those who were eager to see it in print, before he had time to put the finishing hand to it, as has been the unhappiness of some other authors. He can assure the reader, that had his ability bore any tolerable proportion to his time and opportunity, the present production had been without blemish.

But why did I choose any part of sacred history for my theme, will be next asked? Did you not know that the Bible has been laid in a great measure aside for many years past? and that the people of fashion will contemn it, if it

* The author's name was not prefixed to the first edition.

was for nothing else but being akin to Scripture? Yes, I know it very well; but because I have not seen a better book substituted in its room, I would gladly have the use of the Bible revived again. If writers were all agreed to keep to Bible subjects, of course the readers must; for they can only ramble, as they are led by their author. The sacred volume is fertile of subjects, calculated both to please and instruct, when let down, by proper elucidation, within the reach of young capacities. And rather than one class of readers should want entertainment, let me tell them, that the Bible contains many histories of love affairs; perhaps this may tend more to recommend it to attention, than all besides which I could say.

I have sometimes thought, that if instead of useless controversies, upon points which the infinitely wise God never intended to be clearly understood in this life, gentlemen of sacred character were to employ their leisure hours in rendering some part of divine history pleasing, and easy to be understood by young ones, their lives would be spent to much greater advantage than they frequently are. Much time and pains have been taken; much zeal, as hot as a Smithfield fire, has discovered itself in defending that which never was revealed, and in explaining that which is inexplicable; and many a flaming curse has been thundered against those heretics, who would not believe but upon evidence given. Whether my writing the Life of Joseph is not a less abuse, both of the world and of my own precious time, I leave to the reader to determine.

Well, but what induced you to set about writing this same Life of Joseph? I tell you honestly, then, that I was not prayed and intreated to do it, by people who thought me master of the subject, as has been the case with more respectable writers; for no one person ever hinted such an opinion of me. But I wrote it merely to please myself, as the first party concerned; and had fully gained my end, had I been as well pleased with my own performances as I was with the subject.

And pray what induced you to publish it; seeing the world is already burdened with more books than ever will be read? In this also I differ very widely from many of my brother authors, some of whom seem to be objects of our warmest pity. I have grieved, or might have grieved, at the heavy complaints of some authors, whose labours have been taken from them as it were by force of arms. Such was the importunity of friends, who had seen the manuscript, to have it published, that they could not possibly refuse to gratify them, however reluctant they were to appear in print in so discerning an age. But, alas! I cannot pay this compliment to the Life of Joseph; for, to tell the truth, no one creature ever desired me to send it abroad, or so much as to read one page of it in manuscript. The whole affair was settled betwixt myself and honest, but since very unhappy, bookseller.* Certainly those friends act in a very unfriendly manner, who oblige a modest author, contrary to his strongest resolutions to print a performance which he has a very mean opinion of himself, and to expose his reputation in genius and literature, to the hazard of being banded about throughout the whole nation, by those two merciless sets of waggish reviewers, who make nothing at all of laughing at human folly. Were my friends wicked enough to expose me to such disagreeable hardships, I should certainly renounce their friendship for ever; I might indeed say, that the Life of Joseph is *published by request*, if I thought it would promote the sale of it; but, then I should mean the request of my bookseller, who had some hope of making a few pounds of it, if published. But Joseph shall go without disguise, whether it succeed or not.

What is the most wonderful of all in this is, I am not afraid to appear in print even in this age, discerning as it is: not that I think myself censure proof, very far from it.

* Mr. Joseph Johnson, lately burned to the ground in Paternoster Row, and uninsured.

But I have a reason more formidable, and which effectually secures me from apprehending any evil at the hand of the critic; and that other authors may attain the same happiness, I shall reveal the important secret to them. And it is this. I shall be glad to have every fault in the performance pointed out, that I may make the second impression more perfect than the first; therefore, the more curious they are in noting its defects, and candid in communicating them to me, the more I shall deem the critics my friends.

Having given an account of myself, sufficient to satisfy any reasonable reader, I proceed to observe, that I have a class of people in my eye, and for whose sakes chiefly this little performance is sent abroad, amongst whom I hope to have even some admirers. I mean the young and rising generation, whose felicity I hope I can say I have very much at heart. If I can but get their good opinion, I care not who else snarl at the Life of Joseph. I have been much conversant with the geniuses and tempers of young ones, both in my own family of seven children, and in a much larger sphere of action; and have had frequent occasion to mark with regret, that the harsh and severe methods which many take with a view to form the young mind to agreeable habits, have quite the contrary tendency. I have an utter aversion to the crabbed countenance of the cynical pedagogue, who has no other way of imparting instruction but upon the end of his cane, or face of his ferula. If the terrible man, and terrible he is to the little lovely creatures, who shrink as it were into nothing, and shudder at his tremendous menace, would only consider that it is impossible to divide hatred from servile fear, he would perhaps see it necessary to aim at gaining the affection of his young pupils, in order to insure his own success. Or if he himself would go to school to common sense, and learn to dress virtue in its native attractions, and learning in its own innate loveliness, he might spare the labour of the cane and ferula, enjoy the love and esteem of his pupils, instead of their

dread and hatred, and return them to their parents, good proficients in useful learning, instead of branding them with the infamous name of dunce; a name, however, that always proclaims the master's incapacity to teach, and but very seldom want of ability in the boy to learn. Want of ability to learn is very rarely the case, and want of inclination would be much seldomer found than it is, if care was taken to entertain the fancy whilst we would inform the understanding. If learning was made to resemble play rather than slavery, it would become a pleasure instead of a burden. I never yet found that I could succeed by mere precept and penalty; but if I was happy enough to hit upon the turn of my pupil's fancy, I never failed of the desired success. Fancy is an active principle, and will be employed, though in different subjects it operates variously.

The Life of Joseph is designed to entertain my young reader, without vitiating his mind. By setting before him one of the most amiable of sacred characters, in the person of Joseph, the hero of the story, I am not aware of having at all departed from the spirit of the text, nor from the rules of probability. I have indeed ventured upon a few conjectures and fictitious possibilities, which some very grave reader may perhaps be offended with; but in this I am kept in countenance by the most orthodox of our commentators, who all have their suppositions and conjectures on many places of sacred Scripture. It may be, my young reader could even wish that I had more enlarged upon the fanciful part of the story. To him I would make this apology for myself. I wrote with caution, always keeping in my eye the people above referred to, and was cautious of offending them; for I know that it is possible for a man to be deemed a heretic, for a few things which to them appear to be new and out of the beaten tract of orthodoxy; therefore I had a restraint upon my own inclination, which otherwise would have led me to give a free scope to my fancy.

The work is divided into eight books, each of which may

be read at a sitting, even by those young gentlemen and ladies, who have a great deal of other amusements to attend to. Should the Life of Joseph, the son of Israel, be acceptable to those for whom it is designed, I am not certain that I shall not send something more of the same kind abroad into the world.

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH.

BOOK I.

Jacob entertains his family with the history of his own life and that of his father's—Joseph's private reflections upon it—His first dream—His brethren's envy on account of it—Judah and Simeon's different reflections upon Joseph's dream—Reuben endeavours to remove their jealousy—Belphegor's resolution to blow the flame——Simeon's dream inspired by that devil—Joseph's second dream—His brethren's resolution to murder him—The patriarch's care about his sons—Joseph sent to inquire after their welfare—A Canaanite finds him, and invites him to his tent, where he tarries till morning, and dreams an alarming dream—He departs for Dothan—His brethren consult about putting him to death—Reuben interposeth, is exposed to danger from their resentment, and is upbraided with defiling his father's bed—Joseph intercedes for his life in vain—Recites his last alarming dream with a view to move their pity--Reuben dissembles in order to divert his brethren's purpose, and persuades them to cast him into a pit--Joseph's prayer in the pit--Abel, the proto-martyr appears to him, comforts and instructs him.

It was at the end of autumn, when the bounties of Providence were safely gathered in, that venerable Jacob entertained his convened family with the history of his own life, and the lives of his father Isaac, and Abraham his grandfather. A story so full of interesting incidents, related in a manner truly pathetic, sometimes excited the friendly tear, and at others the cheerful smile, upon the countenances of his audience. None was more affected than pious Joseph, who seemed earnestly to catch every syllable in the narration; little Benjamin indeed marking the emotions of his brethren's hearts, by their countenances, gave undoubted tokens of filial piety, as well as his elders. Joseph, lovely Rachel's eldest born, was employed in contemplating the vicissitudes experienced by his revered parent, and could not forbear sympathizing with him in every part of the history, whilst tears bright as orient pearls ran down his cheek. Even when alone, he could not but ruminate on the wisdom and goodness of the God of heaven, in setting virtuous Jacob before Esau the profane, notwithstanding nature and Isaac's choice seemed to have designed otherwise. Says he to himself when alone, "Raw and unexperienced as I am, young and untaught either in the mysteries of religion, or the mazes of deceit

among men of this world, I can see a very wide difference between my father and my uncle Esau. A greater difference there was not between the roughness of the latter, and the delicacy of the former, when examined by experienced Isaac's careful touch, than there is between their two minds, formed so very different from one another. And who made, or could make the difference but God, from whom the spirit of life originally came, and who formed them both in the same maternal womb. I adore thee, O my God, that the promise is with my father Jacob." Often did he reflect with pleasure and delight on the gracious visits, which the patriarch received from the Almighty at Bethel and Peniel. "Oh," said he, "that this same God, the God of my father, may be with me, even as he hath been with him! that this God may be my God in the land of the living, and my guide and portion for ever and ever."

Thus meditating on the changes through which Providence had brought his father, and earnestly imploring grace to imitate the patriarchal conduct, he was seized by the lulling charms of balmy rest, and sunk beneath the superiority of the angel of drowsiness. As he slept, he dreamed, and lo! all his brethren and he were together in the neighbouring field, laboriously reaping the nodding harvest; when, to his amazement, the sheaf which he had last reaped stood upright in the midst, as a governor; and all his brethren's sheaves, as so many loyal subjects, hastened to pay their court, falling down prostrate before it. Unacquainted with malice and envy, and not knowing but his brethren were as free from it as himself, he very innocently told them his dream: but, alas! the distinguished regard at all times shewed him by his indulgent parent had already called up the demons of malice and envy to possess their unequal hearts. They heard him with attention, and felt the impression in their hearts, but could not hinder the disagreeable sensation from discovering itself on their countenances; so sure an index is the countenance to the heart. He, as a youth who loves instruction, asked them what could be the meaning of such a dream? But they disguised their apprehension, and with affected disdain turned from him, telling him they understood nothing of the matter. But no sooner was he de-

parted from them, than they entered into consultation among themselves, relating to the affair. Judas first began, "My brethren," said he, "the dream which the youth has related to us, however innocent and thoughtless he may be respecting it, the event appears to me something more than the influence of mere imagination; and if my judgment is not misled, it is ominous of superior dignity in the person of Joseph, or the dominion of his seed over the children of his father."—"For my own part," returned Simeon, "I consider the whole as the fruit of ambition; you know he has been fostered up in a vain conceit of himself, by the overweening fondness of an indulgent and doting parent. Seeing himself placed first in the paternal affections, who knows but his pretended dream is a scheme concerted to root himself the deeper in his father's heart, with a view to supplant us of the patriarchal blessing, as our father did our uncle Esau? Or if he really did dream what he has now related, is it not pretty plain from thence, that it is owing to his mind running upon the wished for dominion?" Reuben now rejoined his brother Simeon thus: "The patriarch's partiality towards Joseph can never be justified; for, if brethren are expected to dwell in unity, there must be an equality among them; partiality in a parent being the seed of certain dissentions among his children. Yet we ought to do the boy justice, he is truly lovely in his person; even in his opening graces, you may see all the beauty of his mother, mingled with the masculine gravity of our renowned father; besides, his temper is amiable and mild, his manners sweet and attractive: let us not then load the good man with reproach, even if he should love our brother with superior regard. Our father was put before his elder brother, and thereby the promise descends to us; let us not then too hastily condemn the youth, before we know what the Almighty will do with him."

Thus reasoned the sons of Jacob, whilst Belphegor, an angel of the damned race, implacable in his hatred against mankind in general, and especially against the children of the promise, returning from a detestable incursion in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, drew near, and hovered in the air over their heads, to acquaint himself with their circumstances, the better to embitter their lot, if not precipitate them into ruin. He was a witness to the pertur-

bation of Simeon's heart, and resolved that the flame, already kindled, should not die, whilst it was in his power to throw oil upon it. What the malignant spirit aimed at was to excite him to embrue his hands in Joseph's youthful blood, as before he had done in that of the Shechemites; which, as he concluded, if executed, would answer infernal purposes in divers respects; that it would bring down the holy patriarch with sorrow to the grave; it would bring an everlasting reproach upon the chosen race; and, it might provoke a just God to visit them with some terrible judgment. To accomplish this with the greater facility, he resolved to impose upon his senses by a dream: for which purpose he watched him in his tent, and perceiving him in a deep sleep, he first breathed upon his eyes a hellish damp, that diffused darkness and horror through his whole soul. Then directing his views to futurity, he discovered Joseph in a chair of state, himself and his brethren prostrate before him, entreating mercy at his hands; by and by he finds himself bound in fetters, in the presence of his brethren, and cast into a dungeon; now he sees his own seed, the drudging menials of the seed of Joseph. The name of Joseph is extolled to the heavens, and those of his brethren mentioned but with coolness; and some of them, particularly his own, with abhorrence, Withal, he saw the behaviour of Joseph's children to be haughty and tyrannical to their enslaved brethren. So did the parent of error mislead his judgment, by the delusion of a hell-inspired dream. Simeon awoke in the morning, and addressed himself to his pastoral care, following the fleecy race as they cropped the verdant herbage; but a sullen pensiveness was settled on his countenance, the cause of which he chose not as yet to reveal.

In the meanwhile Joseph grew in stature, in the affection of his father, and the fear of his God. And, ere long, he dreamed again a dream of the same import with the former. He fancied himself in a pleasant meadow, covered with the freshest verdure, bespangled with the many coloured stains of natural dye; the lion, the leopard, and panther, were hid in silence in their lonesome retreats; their nocturnal prowlings in the desert were suspended, and only the voice of the nightingale was heard. As he walked along, admiring the beauties of nature, and adoring

the supreme Creator, he perceived an uncommon motion among the celestial spheres; the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, flew swiftly from their orbits, and came and made obeisance to him. The next day, after evening oblations were offered up, and Jacob's family convened to supper, such as the simplicity of those days admitted of; unsuspecting Joseph told his dream before them all. His father heard with thoughtful attention, yet deemed it prudent to conceal for the present his thoughts, not knowing what envy it might excite among his brethren, and therefore gave him a slight rebuke, by saying, "Shall I, and thy mother, and thy brethren, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" The dream and interpretation of it had both taken possession of the patriarch's mind; and, notwithstanding his reproof to Joseph, he pondered it in his heart, and considered it as divinely inspired, portending some important event.

It was quite otherwise with Joseph's brethren: this last brought the former dream afresh into their minds, and they began to fancy themselves as almost in servitude to their brother already. The repetition of the dream increased their envy, and alarmed their apprehensions; especially when Simeon, who had concealed his dream until now, had related it to them. They considered the whole as fixed by fate, and saw but one way to prevent the execution of the decree; and that was (horrid to name!) to cut short his period of life, as if there had not been blood enough already upon their guilty souls. Strange indeed, that the parents of the chosen seed should be found contending with their God, and striving to prevent the execution of his purposes! How unsearchable are the ways of the Most High! and his judgments past finding out!

They now departed to their rural employment; first to Shechem, where the herbage was soon devoured, and from thence to Dothan, where there was plenty of grass, and shelter for their cattle. Unfurnished with that dutiful regard, due to so good a father, their departure was concealed from him; whether from thoughtlessness, or with a view to find occasion to destroy Joseph, I pretend not to say: but their absence filled the patriarch's mind with solicitous concern for their welfare; wherefore he resolved to send his beloved Joseph in quest of them, to learn their situation. In

the meanwhile, being arrived in Dothan, they consult together what methods to take to prevent the grandeur of their detested brother, and his death was determined on by the majority. Thus sin at first discovered itself to be exceeding sinful by the horrid act of fratricide; and now the issue of this counsel was, that brethren should shed their brother's blood, and that without so much as the allegation of guilt against him.

Joseph was dispatched by his father to inquire after the health of his brethren, a task which was extremely agreeable to a mind like his, formed to offices of benevolence. First he went to Shechem, where he expected to have found them; but, instead of them, he met with a stranger, who seeing a comely young man wandering in the fields, drew near, and thus accosted him: "Young man, if I mistake not, you are a stranger in these parts, wandering in quest of some desired object: I am a native of this country, and if you will be pleased to command me, I am ready to serve you to the utmost of my power." It is the will of heaven that we should not be neglectful of strangers, but perform all offices of good-will towards them, and we find our account in obeying the precept, for the God of heaven is the guardian of strangers. Joseph, affected with the good-will of this stranger, meekly replied: "My friend, for such your sentiments bespeak you, I am here at this time in search of my brethren, who should be feeding their flocks near to this place; I shall take it kind if you can inform me whereabouts they are."—"If," replied the stranger, "you mean the ten sons of Israel, the Hebrew, I can help you in this matter, for it is but three days since I was with them upon business; when, finding the adjacent pastures consumed by their numerous flocks, I heard them conclude upon going to Dothan, where the earth produceth herbage in the richest luxuriance.

"If you are brother to these godlike shepherds, let me prevail with you to refresh yourself in my tent, which is at no great distance; and in the morning, as soon as the cheerful sun illumes our horizon, you shall depart in peace." The day being far advanced, and the sable evening drawing near, our youthful hero accepted of the kind invitation, and slept in the tent of the Canaanite. Retiring to rest, his dreams came into his mind, earnestly he wished for the

interpretation of them; but, amidst his contemplations, he fell asleep, and dreamed one of a very different nature. He fancied himself wandering in an unknown field, amidst the nocturnal gloom; sun, moon, and stars, having hid their radiance in the density of the atmosphere. Pensive and melancholy he wandered with painful steps he knew not whither. No voice was heard but that of beasts of prey, upon their nightly ravages; the growling of the lion, and hooting of the bird of darkness, were the only music that saluted his ear. Ere he was aware, he fell into a horrible pit, inhabited by hissing snakes, and other deadly reptiles; and, in the fall, his many-coloured coat was torn piecemeal, and hung upon the bushes over him. He had but just reached the bottom when two monstrous adders warped themselves about his legs, which frighted him so that he awoke and rejoiced that it was but a dream. Some benevolent spirit of the ethereal race, having heard the malevolent consultations of his brethren, might take this method of apprizing him of some danger near at hand, that he might guard himself against their bloody designs. But Joseph's friendly heart was incapable of suspicion. He would have deemed it a crime in him never to be forgiven, to have entertained, but for a moment, the least jealousy of their humanity. Had integrity and uprightness equally governed the rest of thy sons, O Jacob! what scenes of sorrow wouldst thou have escaped, and how gently would time have conducted thee through the decline of life!

The reverse of Joseph's disposition was theirs; for the moment they saw him afar off, they renewed their determination against him to destroy him, and by one bold stroke to free themselves from the fear of his future advancement. "According to our wish (cried raptured Levi), he comes; behold this dreamer cometh!" Returned Simeon, "Now is the time, brethren, let us put him to death, and see what will become of his dreams." "Not so (replied Reuben): how shall we, who have the adoption and covenant, we who are the seed of the promise, be guilty of fratricide? What! shall we who are called to lift up holy hands, and to offer pure oblations to the God of heaven, stain our souls with the blood of an innocent brother? Remember, brethren, the blood of Abel cried from the earth to the Lord, to whom vengeance belongs; and will not the blood of

Joseph rouse the wrath of the Omnipotent? and who shall escape when an avenging God pursueth? Is our father partial in favour of the youth, the fault is not with him. Envy itself must confess his merit. Are his dreams ominous of his future greatness; cannot Joseph be great without our being slaves to him? Shall we slay our brother for the licentious rovings of unbridled imagination?—Who can answer for dreams? Could we even convict him of ambition, might not his youth and inexperience in some measure plead his excuse? Farther experience, growing acquaintance with men and things, would teach him that man is not originally designed for slavery. Let the old man our father plead for his Joseph. His life is wrapt up in that of his child. And will you dare to murder the father in the son, and pierce his heart through the blood of his Joseph? Think of our father, my brethren; see him weeping a detested life away over his murdered son, murdered by the begotten of his father: murdered by the very men in whom he confided without reserve. Let the fear of God, and the love due to so venerable a father, be advocates for his helpless youth; and let me never see the evil that shall, by this villanous barbarity, be brought upon Israel, the favourite of heaven."

"Is this Reuben," with malicious irony, cried Levi, "Reuben the first-born of Jacob? The pious Reuben, who in a frenzy of brutal lust crept into his father's bed and defiled it? Where was thy fear of God, thy love and veneration for thy father then? Art thou our dictator? Thou who couldest not spare even thy father's wife, all of a sudden become so pious? Art thou so careful for thy father's life, thou who alone hadst audacity to cuckold him! Let shame for ever shut Reuben's mouth, and leave it to good men to be advocates for virtue."

"Your invective, my brother," said Reuben, "stings me with the keenest remorse. I own the charge to be just, and cannot forget the evil of my sin. I have dishonoured my God, my father, and myself; and have left thereby an indelible stain on my offspring to the latest generation. But the heavy days, and the many sleepless nights, that this foul miscarriage has cost me, though they can never extenuate my highly aggravated guilt from before the God of Jacob, might in some measure exempt me from the up-

braidings of my brethren. Believe me, Levi, my own conscience serves as a thousand reprovers, and needs not your cruel assistance. Yet it is just, my brother, and I cannot resent it. But my former impiety is indeed the reason wherefore I cannot fall into your bloody measures. My conscience too, loudly tells me that I have guilt enough upon my soul already, without contracting more in such a horrid manner as this which Simeon has prescribed; that I have already been the cause of more than enough of sorrow, to my dear and honoured father, without joining in the murder of his son, to bring down his venerable, hoary head, with insupportable sorrow to the grave. He whose conscience groans under the weight of incestuous adultery, has little need to add to the burden the tremendous weight of innocent blood. I cannot therefore consent to the deed."

"The indelible stain which Reuben, by his own confession, hath fixed on himself and offspring, may reconcile the baseness of his mind to slavery," said Simeon; "but our seed is free, and not born to servitude. Therefore Joseph by my advice shall die: if pious and reformed Reuben will not consent to his death, he dies along with him. Why should he live to be able to accuse us to our father? One condition, and only one, if you are all agreed, I would have offered to Reuben: if he agrees to that he lives, and if not, he and Joseph die together; for he shall never be the publisher of our guilt. Let Reuben become our accomplice, otherwise bind himself by an oath to the most inviolate secresy. By this alone can he hope to prolong his life. Speak, Reuben, do you accept the conditions?"

"Give me till to-morrow about this time to consider of it, and then you shall have my answer," replied Jacob's elder-born.

"One hour, and no more, we grant; at which time we expect your answer," rejoined the brethren in wickedness.

By this time Joseph came nigh to his brethren; and, smiling with delight at having found them together, came near to embrace them, and inquire after their health. But what inexpressible surprise seized him, when, instead of returning his caresses, they turned away from him, and shook him off, with vengeance louring on their countenances. Instantly he is seized, stripped of his rich party-coloured coat, and fettered both hands and feet. Alarmed, Reuben cried,

"Stop, stay your hand but one hour, the hour promised, and ye shall then have my answer." All agreed that one hour and no more should be granted ere Joseph was put to death: and Reuben, casting a look of despair and pity on his fettered brother, "I wish," said he, "your duty to your father, and love to your brethren, could have admitted your staying at home, instead of visiting these men, who are bent upon your destruction;" so saying, he precipitately withdrew to consider what answer he should deliver to his brethren.

The elder brother gone, and Joseph, enclosed amidst his sanguinary brethren, like a helpless lamb amongst so many voracious wolves, was thus addressed by one of them: "Ambitious youth! think now of your state: one hour elapsed, and the tide of your ambition is for ever stemmed; one hour puts a period to your life, which is forfeited to our liberty. Die you must, and shall, if fate had decreed the contrary." He replied, "Had I known the malignity of your intentions, I might have avoided the snare; but duty to my father and to my brethren, and therefore duty to my God brings me here; if he hath led me hither for slaughter, I ought, I must submit; but if my God sees it for the honour of his majesty to preserve me, he hath power to change your purposes, as he turns the rivers of water, or may point out means whereby I may be delivered from your vengeance. Tell me what I have done, wherein I have offended you; if I have erred it is unwittingly, and it is hard to be put to death for inadvertency. Make known my faults; and if I reform them not, let loose your fury upon me. But I adjure you by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that ye slay me not unconvicted. If I have wronged any of you, I am willing to make restitution to the utmost; if I have offended, to submit myself, and to implore forgiveness: but, O! cut me not off in my youth, before I arrive at the state of manhood!"—"Yes, youngster," replied Simeon, "you have wronged us so that you cannot make restitution. You have stolen the affections of a partial father, which you cannot restore; you have set yourself up, by your pretended dreams, as our lord and governor; ye have made us and our children, yea and our father himself to do homage to your pride; but we shall soon see what your greatness will come to. You shall not live to triumph over your enslaved brethren; die you must!"

"Alas! must I then die for my dreams. Which of you has the government of his fancy whilst asleep? O Simeon! my brother Simeon, could I help my dreams? I little thought that they would have given offence to any of you, when I innocently related them. I want no superiority; I account myself unworthy even of equal regard, much more so of superior esteem. If my father shews any partiality towards me, it is for my mother's sake, and not for any thing in me. And must I die for any little partiality in my father? Make the case your own, my dear Simeon: would you like to be put to death for any rovings of your dreaming imaginations? To be murdered in cold blood for what you could not possibly help? If I must die for having dreamed a dream, which you think portends felicity and greatness, give me leave to relate to you one that I dreamed last night: if the former excited your anger and resentment, the latter may as justly entitle me to your compassion and sympathy." Leave obtained, he related the dream he had in the tent of the Canaanite, which his brethren heard with rising indignation; and, as soon as he had finished, Simeon spake to his brethren with fury flashing from his eyes: "This dream is an artful contrivance of the insolent wretch, to fix a lasting reproach upon us, and upon our seed. We, my brethren, are intended by the deadly serpents: perhaps I myself am meant by one of the adders that warped themselves about his legs, and wakened him in such a fright: but why do we suffer him to prate any longer? One stroke of my scimitar will put an end to his insolence. Ambitious wretch! thou shalt prate no more." Here he drew his sword, and rushed up to have cloven the stripling in twain; but Judah caught him in his arms, and cried, "Stop, stop, my Simeon. Remember the promise we have just now made to Reuben; wait the time, and let us see what resolution he comes to."

"O Judah!" cried Joseph, "Judah, my honoured brother: thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: May I hope to find an intercessor in thee? What if thy sons, either Er or Onan, were in the same condition in which thou seest me? How would thy bowels yearn over them! See their distress in mine: feel my father's affliction in thine own: act a faithful part in delivering me from my enraged brethren, who are this day risen up against me without a cause. O Judah! let me owe my life, and all the happiness of it, to

a brother so honourable in the house of his father. And you, O Simeon and Levi! think, think of the guilt ye will bring upon yourselves by perpetrating a deed so horrid! Ye may escape punishment from the hand of man, but assure yourselves ye will not escape from the hand of God. For judgment is his, and he will repay it either in this life, or that which is to come."

Thus Joseph interceded for a life, now indeed rendered wretched by the unkind behaviour of his father's sons, more out of desire to dissuade them from contracting fresh guilt, than from any dread that he had of death, or what should follow after it; whilst Reuben retired behind a neighbouring thicket, to pour out the bitterness of his soul before God, and pray to be directed what part he should act in the present iniquitous affair. How shall I act, said he? If I consent, I bring guilt upon my own soul, and add murder to my incest. If I do not consent, my life is forfeited to the jealousy of my brethren, who will never be easy whilst I am alive, let me be tied to secresy by what oath soever. Surrounded by evils, prudence dictates to choose the least, that thereby we may escape the greater. I must at all events endeavour to save the boy's life: in order to which I must consent to his death, and may perhaps win so far upon his enemies, as to leave the manner of his death to me. His heart was divided between the thoughts of his own safety and Joseph's; the sorrow which he foresaw ready to fall upon his aged father, and the guilt just about to be contracted by his brethren; but still he steadily determined to use his best endeavours for the safety of the youth. With this resolution, although dissembled, he returned to the rest seemingly with a placid countenance, and thus addressed them: "My brethren, I am now ready to concur with your measures, and even to be active therein, upon one small condition being granted me; which is, that instead of shedding his blood, we confine him till death in yonder pit, on the other side of the pasture."—"Agreed," replied his brethren, "so that he dies, no matter how. And hereby Reuben makes himself not only an accomplice, but a principal actor in the tragedy. Away with him to the pit, and there let the sun, moon, and stars, pay their court to him as their governor."

At this instant, they hurried him away to the proposed

pit, whilst he, in anguish of heart, summoned them all to meet him hereafter before the judgment seat of the King of kings, where he assured them he should have justice done him. This appeal he designed as a means of conviction, whereby his brethren might be brought to repentance, that their sins might be blotted out, when times of refreshing should come from the presence of the Lord.

Joseph, now let down into the pit, Reuben rejoiced in hope of having it in his power to deliver him safe the ensuing night to his good old father, whose heart he knew must pant with painful anxiety till his return. Having determined upon this salutary project, he left him there, and went to dispatch some pastoral business among the menial herdsmen, at a different part of the wilderness, purposing ere long to return. In the mean while, Joseph having nothing but death to expect, and hardly even desiring any thing else, lifted up his soul in fervent prayer to the God of his salvation. "Thou God," he cried, "whose presence fills immensity itself; whose eyes see, and whose eyelids try the actions and hearts of men; thou must of necessity be present here, and witness to all my treatment from my brethren. So far as the appointment is thine, I desire cheerfully to submit to it, and own thy conduct just, as I have deserved a thousand deaths ere now. But, Lord, my brethren's motives differ from thine as far as east from west; for envy do they now rise up against me. Here I am in all appearance shut up for certain death. My God, let not my blood be charged upon the sons of my father. My God forgive their iniquity. And, O Lord, do thou support my aged father under the pangs of sorrow, which he will from his paternal fondness necessarily feel. Support him, O my God, and give him to bear his affliction in my loss, becoming the parent of the chosen race. Here I am, thou God of heaven and earth. I must die if thou interpose not. If death is designed for me, help me to bear it with humble resignation; but, Lord, if thou pleaseth to prolong a life altogether insignificant, thou hast the means in thine own hand. Use them as will be most for thy glory." Here he was surprised by an uncommon radiance, which diffused itself through the place. A splendour which overcame him with the sweetest sensation, and gave his enraptured soul a large taste of

ethereal felicity. The amazing brightness a little dim nished, so far as to enable mortal eyes to endure it, there stood a blooming youth confessed to his view. The instant the celestial visitant discovered himself, he thus accosted the son of Jacob: "I am sent, by my God and thine; I am sent to inform thee that he is well acquainted with all thy afflictions, and perfectly knows thy present distress. Not Jehovah only, but the hosts of heaven in general are witnesses of thy misery. The celestial legions bowed over the brow of heaven, and beheld the baleful deed with as much uneasiness and fearful apprehension for thee, as celestial spirits are capable of, till the purpose of the Eternal was revealed. But this calmed every mind, and the sovereign will of thy God reconciled in an instant the will of myriads. I am Abel the protomartyr; I fell, my Joseph, by the hand of my brother Cain, and the day of my fall was the day of my exultation. O Joseph, did you but know the joys prepared for those that love the Lord, you would not wish to prolong life a moment. But your time is not come. You are designed to foster infant Israel under the shadow of your wings. You must be sold into Egypt to govern that fertile land, and provide sustenance for the seed of the promise. Even to-day you must begone; for thy God makes use of thy brethren's jealousy for this very purpose. Only remember, that when thou art in Egypt, thou wilt be tempted; but keep it ever in thy mind that the God of the Hebrews sent thee thither. There shall thy brethren bow down to thee. There shalt thou embrace thy father, and there shall Benjamin fall upon thy neck, and shed the fraternal tear. Be not careful about thy father's affliction. Leave him to his God, he shall be supported and brought through. When the day is thine, think well of thy brother Reuben, he had thee here purposely to deliver thee, but he must see thee no more, till you meet in the court of Pharaoh. I leave thee, Joseph; the peace of thy God go with thee."

BOOK II.

Joseph taken out of the pit—Sold to Alvah an Ishmaelite—Reuben returns to the pit—His sorrow and despair at missing Joseph—His lamentation—He chargeth the murder upon his brethren—Judah repents of what was done, and informs Reuben—They send out messengers to overtake him, and bring him back—An angel appears to Reuben and comforts him—They dip Joseph's coat in blood, and send it to Jacob—Jacob's grief and Dinah's despair—Joseph's arrival in Egypt—The friendly treatment he meets with from Alvah—He chooseth to abide in Egypt—Potiphar sees him on the mart, and conceives a liking to him—Purchases him, and presents him to Sabrina, his new married lady—A grand hunting match in the desart—Joseph kills a lion, and delivers his mistress—Sabrina conceives a violent passion for him—Gabriel inspires Joseph with a dream, ominous of danger—His prosperity—Joseph saves his mistress a second time from a band of Arabs—His mistress's passion thereby greatly inflamed.

Absorbed in thought the son of Israel lay, after the heavenly vision was departed, when Judah came to the brim of the pit, and calling Joseph by name, let down a rope which he ordered him to tie about his body below his arms · then he and his brethren drew him out of the pit, and led him to a numerous caravan of merchants, going from Gilead to Egypt, with myrrh, balm, and spicery. Confident in the word of the heavenly messenger he ascended out of the pit, dreading no evil, and suffered himself to be sold to Alvah, the chief of the company, for twenty pieces of silver. The youthful beauty and mature understanding of our hero, equally conspired to endear him to his master, who soon employed him in the government of his camels, with whom we leave him, whilst we follow Reuben from the distant field to the pit. "Joseph, my brother, Joseph," he cried, but Joseph made no answer; he repeated the doleful invitation, but still no voice was heard. He rent his garments, tore his hair, and roamed about the brink of the pit in the greatest anguish of soul, and thought to throw himself down into it, and die with his lost brother. At last, having spent himself to no purpose, he called Joseph's last dream to remembrance, and dreaded its being literally fulfilled. Then he thought again, can my brethren have treacherously murdered him in the absence of his friend. O false and dreadful brethren! cruel and bloody men! to shed the blood of the innocent, contrary to solemn contract. Racked with despair and glowing resentment, he reasoned within himself, whether it were not best to rush upon his brethren and plunge his dagger in each of their hearts,

one by one, till he himself should perish upon the point of their swords. In one minute he was fully bent upon the bloody purpose; in the next, the horrors of an agonizing parent, expiring over his murdered family, pierced him to the heart. Then he cried, " O my father, my father, how wretchedly I am deceived! I thought to have been happy in making some atonement for my past guilt, by delivering thy darling from his murderous brethren, and restoring him safe to thy fond embrace. But, ah! I am deceived! Joseph is lost! irretrievably lost! And what sorrows will wring the heart of my parent, when he learns that Joseph is no more. O my Joseph! gladly would I revenge thy blood upon thy murderers. But, alas! the loss of one is more than enough for a tender parent to bear. How would his aged heart sink under the carnage which this arm would make, should I give scope to my just revenge! But, O my father, my father! for thy sake I live, and leave it to God to avenge the death of thy son." So saying, he went up to his brethren, grief and resentment sparkling in his eyes.

" False men, where is the lad? Where is Joseph? could you not withhold your bloody hands from him for one night, that the unhappy youth might have had time to pour out his heart unto his God? But alas! he is gone! and I, whither shall I fly? How shall I answer to his father for his untimely death? What agonies must the good man feel when he hears that Joseph is no more! O my father! O Joseph! my poor Joseph!" So saying, his overswelled heart breaks forth in gushing sorrow, which trickled down his manly cheeks like chrystal waters from the diamond rock. But surely never did tears better become the masculine countenance than now! Such was the anguish of Reuben's spirit, that like a contagion his grief reached the hearts of his brethren; and even Simeon himself felt, for a moment, something like remorse. A solemn silence reigned in the whole assembly.

Judah at last broke through the gloom that covered them, and addressed Reuben. " My brother, permit your sorrow to subside; suffer your reason to supersede your passion, and coolly hear what I have to offer. I am now thoroughly convinced that what we have done is wrong, notwithstanding Joseph is yet alive." Reuben quickly replied, " If he lives let me set my eyes upon him, that my

heart may be at rest." "Alas!" said Judah, "though he lives, I cannot present him to you. For I, even I, to save his life, advised to sell him to some Midianitish merchants who passed by here in your absence. This is done and cannot be undone, or it should. And I am now more convinced than ever, that he will live to see his dreams fulfilled, and his brethren to bow down unto him. Yes, my brethren, his last night's dream has been amply verified; for it may be truly said, he fell into a pit of serpents, even in the house of his father. I feel within me some monitor telling me, that God, who weighs the actions of men in an even balance, will visit and punish my having concurred in separating Joseph from his father and brethren, by the judicial death of my own children. O that it was undone again, and that we had it in our power to restore him to his father."

All the brethren heartily concurred in Judah's sentiments, Simeon alone excepted. "For his part," he said, "all that he grieved at was, that they had suffered him to escape, and leave him within the possibility of superiority. When we had him," said he, "it was madness to let him go."—"I would not for the world," said the rest of his brethren, "Simeon, that it had been as you would have wished it." But Reuben flew from his place like lightning, and would instantly have killed Simeon; but that Naphthali, who perceived from his countenance the effect that Simeon's sanguinary speech had made upon his heart, arose with the swiftness of a hind, caught his elder brother by the arm, and begged for Jacob's sake that he would moderate his passion. Again composed, the brethren consult how they may strive to regain their lost brother. It was agreed to send out messengers, early in the morning, to overtake the Ishmaelites, offer to Alvah the price given for Joseph, and as much more as might procure his release. This agreed upon, and messengers appointed for the negotiation, they all retired to rest, every one with his servants, to his separate tent. Reuben was just laid down, and striving to compose himself to rest, when a dazzling glory shone through all the tent, and a voice more than human called him by name—"Reuben, Reuben, first-born of Israel, hear my words, and attend unto my speech. You mourn for Joseph, and not without cause, considering the

occasion of his exile. But know this, that he is the peculiar care of his God, who is with him wherever he goes, and who will make whatever he does to prosper. He shall find a friend, a father, and brethren in a strange land, where he shall dwell securely, till his brethren, unknown to themselves, shall bow down unto him with the humblest supplications. For Joseph shall be found. Thine arms shall yet embrace him, Reuben; and the whole world shall know him as the nursing father of the chosen race. Meanwhile secure thine own life, Reuben, by concealing the matter from hoary Israel, lest the rage of thy brethren mix thee untimely with the dust; for some of them are old in bloodshed, and shudder not at human carnage. Observe my words, and all shall be well."

As Phœbus approached the north-east verge of this dusky world, and fair Aurora purpled the sky, the messengers set out by different ways to overtake the caravan: they roamed through howling wastes and sandy desarts to no purpose; till, spent with the fatigue of the day, they returned faint and weary the ensuing night, to their brethren at Dothan. Every countenance discovered disgust and sorrow; even Simeon could have wished for Joseph's return. Reuben alone maintained a placid countenance, to the surprise of all his brethren, who saw his rage and despair so suddenly turned into calm serenity. He said, "Come, my brethren, let us leave off caring for Joseph. The pious youth is the care of his God, who will never forsake the needy in their affliction. Let us concert some measures to support our good old father under the heavy weight of affliction, just falling upon his venerable head. O Jacob! revered old man, my heart bleeds for thee. A tide of sorrow will soon overwhelm thee. But thou hast the promise, and my God is thine. May he indeed be near to thee."

"Matters being as they are," said Asher, "I hold it good that we kill a kid or a lamb, take Joseph's many-coloured coat, rend it in divers places, and smear it with the blood of the slain beast, and send it to our father, who will naturally conclude, that some hungry lion has devoured him, and we, his sons, shall be freed from all suspicion. We are necessitated either to confess the fact, or cover it over with dissimulation. If we do the former, we draw down

the curse of our father upon us; and there is at least a strong probability, that by the latter we shall retain his love and confidence; though God knows we little deserve it."

The advice given by Asher was immediately approved, and Simeon and Levi were appointed the messengers to carry the coat unto Jacob, all the rest being unable to bear the sorrow of their parent upon this mournful occasion. How nearly allied is one sin to another! The sons of Jacob have now no covering for their infamy, but lying and dissimulation. "Welcome, my sons, welcome Simeon and Levi," says the tender patriarch; "how do all your brethren, my children, and how does Joseph?"—"Our brethren, sir, are all well; but, as for Joseph, we have seen nothing of him."—"Seen nothing of him," replied he, "these five days are gone since I sent him forth to visit his brethren, and inquire after your health. I pray God that my fears may be groundless. O that no harm may have befallen my boy!"—"We would hope for the best, sir, and yet we are not without fear about him ourselves," said they, "seeing he is not at home. As we came along through the wilderness, we found a coat that somewhat resembles our brother's; but you will better judge of it when you see it. This, sir, is the coat we found; see now whether it be thy son's coat or not."—"Ah! it is my son's coat indeed: without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces," he said, and the blood receding from his countenance, he sunk down into the chair, and could not for a long time be recovered from his fit. The household was alarmed. Benjamin and all his daughters flew to his assistance, and the general cry was; O our father! Our father! Our good father is dying. Dinah flew about the tent, tearing her hair in the utmost distraction, crying, "O my father, my father, would to God I had died in thy stead. What shall thy daughter, thy friendless Dinah do now? A dishonour to her race; now turned out into an inhospitable world, without the protection of a father. Wretched Dinah! Better hadst thou never been born! Cursed be the son of Hamor. Cursed be he that glories in the destruction of a virgin." One of the female train chafed his withered limbs, another rubbed his temples with odours, till at last life began to return. Fetching a deep sigh, his eyes wildly

rolling, he asked, "Where am I? What has been the matter, my daughters? Why have ye disturbed me? I am now waked out of the soundest sleep that ever I fell into. My Dinah, where is she? Tell me, my girl, what ails thee; I am thy father, Dinah; come near my love, and let me embrace thee. Bid Joseph to come speedily, I want to see him. Ay, now I have hit the sore. Joseph is gone, Dinah! Joseph is rent to pieces. Bring that bloody coat: that coat, Benjamin, is thy brother Joseph's; he wears it no more. Some of that voracious army, wherewithal God hath plagued sinful man, hath torn him in pieces and devoured him. O my Joseph! my Joseph! Had I a thousand lives, I would have given them all to have redeemed thee from death. But thou art gone, my son, for ever gone from the land of light, and I shall soon follow thee into that of darkness. I come, my son; I follow thee; I soon shall join thee in the land afar off. Hasten thy pace, thou tardy executioner; cut short thy work, thou friendly enemy; I long once more to encircle my son in these withered arms. Yet my Dinah, poor, ruined damsel, if I could, I would live for thy sake, a little to alleviate thy sorrows. But I die my girl; I find I cannot long survive my Joseph." Lovely Benjamin, Dinah, and their sisters, endeavoured to console the mourning patriarch under this heavy loss. But all in vain. He refused to be comforted, saying, "Nay, but I will die with my son." Shunah the wife of Judah, Tamah the wife of Simeon, and Zillah the wife of Naphthali, endeavoured to set before him his numerous seed: his eleven remaining sons, their present offspring, and the prospect of a numerous issue. But the good man replied, "These are not my Joseph," and sunk into another fit of agonizing sorrow. Thus he grieved from day to day for the loss of his son, nor could all the endeavours of his children comfort him.

Joseph and his company drew near to Memphis, the capital of Egypt, where the merchants intended to dispose of their goods. And here Alvah the Ishmaelite, found a market for his young Hebrew likewise. Alvah had seen so much of Joseph's dexterity in the management of his affairs, and was so delighted with his piety and good sense, that he would gladly have kept him for his own ser-

vant, had it been his pleasure to have continued with him; but knowing his distressed circumstances, deemed it ungenerous to lay any constraint upon his inclination.

Therefore, the evening after their arrival in Memphis, he called Joseph to him, and thus addressed him: "My young man, I am perfectly sensible that for envy you was separated from your father's house, and sold unto me. Since you came under my direction your agreeable converse, your courteous and affable conduct, has perfectly gained my affections. If you are content to abide with me, I will use you as a friend rather than a servant; for you are dear to me, Joseph, as if you was my own son. Nevertheless, as you may have your objections to returning to the land where your barbarous brethren reside, and as I am uninformed concerning the purposes of your God towards you, I leave you to your own voluntary choice, either to return with me, or to abide in Egypt. But if you fix upon Egypt as your residence, you must be sold my Joseph. Sold as a slave, my friend, notwithstanding I believe you are born to rule." The son of Jacob respectfully replied; "My dear sir, my honoured Alvah, my father, permit me to call you by that endearing name, I cannot enough admire the goodness of God, who provides for me in strangers that friendship which was denied me in the house of my brethren. All was cruelty from them; but friendship, my dear master, has run through the whole of your conduct towards me. Inclination, sir, would induce me to follow your fortune, good or bad, but a secret message delivered to me by a heavenly messenger not two hours before I was sold unto you, obliges me, as your will coincides therewith, to abide a bondman in Egypt. I would not as yet willingly divulge the contents of the message referred to; but the time will come, my honoured master, that I shall more fully reveal the cause of my banishment. Then you will clearly see, that want of respect to you is no part of the reason why I desire to leave your very agreeable service. Permit me, sir, to beg your endeavour to dispose of me as you would wish to have your own son disposed of in similar circumstances, and let me owe my good fortune, if such should befal me in a strange land, to a man to whom I am already under so many great obligations. Thus, sir, will you bind me to

you for ever, and make me more yours than I possibly could be as one of your domestic servants."

"I will Joseph," replied the good Ishmaelite; "I will take care to dispose of you to your best advantage. I will be to you in place of a father at this time. But when you are advanced, my son, as God, even the God of your father Abraham, will advance you to the highest honours, forget not your father. Think of poor Alvah, and for my sake deal favourably with my seed, should they ever make supplication unto you. I will enhance your price, my friend, in some low proportion to your worth, but not a penny of it shall abide with me, for I have profited greatly by your presence already." "My dear sir," replied Joseph, "you are a merchant, and must live upon your gain; why should you throw away any part of it upon a poor unworthy stranger!"—"I tell you, Joseph," returned he, with some emotion, "you are a friend of the Almighty's, and your God will never let poor Alvah be a loser by any little kindness he may shew to you. Be satisfied, Joseph. Be content, I say; and prepare yourself by to-morrow noon for the market; and here, let me see, take these few pieces to provide yourself with decent apparel, and I, in the mean while, will be taking what measures I can for your good." So saying, he turned and gave no time to reply. Joseph, overwhelmed with gratitude, burst forth into tears, admiring the wisdom and goodness of God in raising up unto him, as it were, a second Jacob in the person of Alvah. "O thou Holy One," he cried, "I am now convinced of thine omnipresence and superintendency over human affairs. I admire thy wisdom, I adore thy goodness to me, who am unworthy of the least of all thy mercies; go on my God to perfect what thou hast begun, and succeed the earnest endeavours of benevolent Alvah in my behalf, and succeed thou me, and be thou with me, my father and my friend, in this land wherein I am a stranger, and the glory of all will ultimately rebound unto thee. Amen."

The time arrived that Joseph must appear for sale. He came arrayed in plain but decent apparel, which shewed the graces of his person to the best advantage. His master and he had but just come to the mart, when Potiphar, a renowned officer in the army, and captain-general of the

forces of Egypt, happened to come past, and fixing his eye upon him, conceived a singular liking for him. What pity is it, said he within himself, to see a person of such an attractive deportment, displaying a countenance so distinguishingly lovely, exposed to sale to every sordid wretch of a master? If money will redeem him from slavery it shall be done; and I shall deem myself happy in having released one of the most amiable of human kind. "What is the price of this young man, my master?"

"If he is sold, sir," replied Alvah, "a hundred and fifty pieces is his price; but I sell him not unless I know to whom, and what treatment he is likely to meet with: for it is not necessity, but choice that detains him in Egypt."—"My name," said he, "is Potiphar, I am of some consideration in the state, and near the person of his majesty." "Then, sir, the young man is yours at your own price, and I hope you will consider him as one that might have expected better fortune but for the malice and envy of jealous brethren. I am proud, sir, to recommend him to you as the most virtuous, faithful, and pious of his race." It is agreed. "Are you willing to follow the fortune of Potiphar?" "I am willing to be his humble servant, if, sir, you are."—"Here, then, merchant, here is your money."—"One word, sir, ere the bargain is closed; and that is, that as I trade to this place, I must beg leave to have a friendly interview occasionally with my friend Joseph; for he is my friend, although I have the power of disposing of him at present." "Far be it from Potiphar to hinder the youth he loves from access to his friends. You are welcome at all times to visit your youthful, your amiable friend."

Joseph was placed in Potiphar's family, after Alvah had, according to promise, obliged him to accept of the hundred and fifty pieces for which he was sold, and taken a tender farewell of him for a season. He had not been long in his new station before he gave such proofs of his probity, as gained him the esteem of all the family.

Potiphar was but lately married to a beautiful lady of the first rank, whose name was Sabrina, given to the captain by his majesty himself. The better to solemnize the nuptials of his warlike officer, the king appointed a hunting match in the desart of Arabia, where he was graciously pleased himself to attend Potiphar and Sabrina. They had

not long ranged the lonely wild, ere they roused a monstrous lion, master of a savage family, at whose appearance even the hardiest of them gave back. The surly monster with furious disdain flashing from his eyes, stalked slowly in sullen majesty, and with eyes askance surveyed his competitors, till perceiving himself overmatched by the number of baying-hounds just letting loose upon him, he took to his heels, and sought refuge in the distant thicket. Sabrina, mounted on a swift Arabian horse, well accustomed to exercises of this kind, surpassed the hounds, and even outfled the wind; exposed herself to the greatest danger, to the terror of the noble company, none of whom could come near her, Joseph alone excepted. Mounted on the fleetest of his master's coursers, he kept close to his lady, and well for her it was so; for coming to the edge of the thicket, which, by reason of its closeness would not admit the entrance of the lion, who finding himself so closely pursued, turned fiercely upon his enemies. Sabrina being next unto him, had no doubt fallen a prey to his fury, had not Joseph rushed between her and danger. The savage roared like the loudest thunder, and flew in the greatest ferocity at the lady, who almost swooned at the fright; whilst Joseph sprung from his horse, gored the monster in the neck, and pinned him fast with his spear to the earth. By this time Potiphar himself arrived, and, struck with astonishment, partly at the danger in which his Sabrina had been, and partly at the heroic fortitude of his new and beloved servant, he could not speak a word, till falling first on the bosom of his spouse, and then upon Joseph's neck, he poured forth a flood of joy and gratitude. He instantly enfranchised the deliverer of his love, and placed him at the head of his family, where he acted in all respects as one who serveth not man so much as God. Such circumspection and fidelity rarely attend the stewards of gentlemen of elevated rank. Joseph was exceedingly lovely in his person, and the late instance of his gallantry and fortitude, made a criminal impression on the mind of his lady, whilst he, unsuspected thereof, from a principle of duty and benevolence, performed both to her and to his lord, all the good offices within his power, which, although a duty incumbent on him, contributed to foster the latent flame unlawfully kindled in her warped heart.

The Almighty Jehovah, whose all-seeing eye, with one comprehensive glance examineth all our thoughts, whether virtuous or corrupt, seeing the workings of Sabrina's heart, and having destined the blooming youth to escape the snare so fatal to his hopes, as well as ruinous to the peace of his undisturbed mind, commanded Gabriel to descend to earth, and give the stripling some intimation of the danger he was in, yet still to conceal the quarter from whence it was to come. Obedient to the high behest of the Eternal, the seraph, pressed with glowing ardour, binds on his golden pinions, shoots through the vault of ether, and stops not till arrived at the palace of Potiphar, when gloomy night, in her ebon car, had measured half her lonesome journey. He breathed an odoriferous gale upon the bed, and instantly the Hebrew exile felt the warm glow of exalted virtue ascending towards the empyreum. Sweet was the slumber when the pious soul breathed after joys of an immortal nature. Soon he fancied himself, studious of his master's affairs, assiduously promoting the interest of his generous patron. Thus employed, he saw a hand drawing a net composed of golden wire around the place where he stood, and instantly found himself entangled therein. The snare appeared so formidable, that he saw no way of escape left for him, nor could he tell to what purpose he was thus involved. Considering himself as a prisoner in this golden snare, he heard a voice as it had been from the aerial regions. "O Joseph! most favoured of the children of Jacob, remember thou the God of the Hebrews. Take hold of the strength of Omnipotence, and one vigorous effort delivers thee from the snare." This said, the young patriarch lifted up his heart to his God, in this short ejaculation: "O God of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for the sake of him who shall bruise the serpent's head, and destroy the snare of the devil, assist me this once and deliver." Then collecting all his force, he exerted himself in one vigorous struggle, and found the wires break as easily, as Sampson afterwards did the new cords with which he was bound. Just as he sprung into liberty, he awoke, and rejoiced that it was but a dream.

Joseph's God was with him in whatever he did. He gave him singular wisdom and prudence in the management of his affairs, insomuch that whatever he did prospered in his

hands; which led his lord to rely upon his wisdom and integrity with a perfect confidence; and unreservedly committed unto his care the sole management of all his estate. Unenvied, he enjoyed this flow of calm prosperity without any mixture of bitterness, besides that which arose from his banishment from Jacob and Benjamin. Happy had it been for Sabrina, if her heart had been as free from unlawful desire as was that of her amiable Hebrew. But, alas! she fondly encouraged the pleasing wish, till it arose to a passion too strong for her to subdue. Shame induced her long to conceal the guilty flame; yet, in spite of art and studious care, an inward langour discovered itself in the pensiveness of her countenance. Her unsuspecting lord called every possible means to her assistance. The sons of Esculapius exhausted their skill; the whole Materia Medica was ransacked for a cure; every diversion which pleasantry could devise, in vain was instituted, to divert the gloom of her solitary mind. She was never happy in any diversions, unless Joseph made one of the party. Her only seasons of pleasure were, when she could prevail with him to sit with her, and entertain her with the history of his native country; which he, unskilled in the mysteries of love, very readily consented to.

About this time an accident happened, which served greatly to increase the fatal passion. Potiphar and Sabrina went on a visit to Ira, a Lybian prince, where they plenteously enjoyed the rites of hospitality for two or three weeks; but unhappily were attacked by a band of Arabs as they repassed the howling wilderness. At the first discovery of them, Sabrina sunk, as a person dying, in the arms of her husband; and her soul stood, as it were, on tiptoe, on her pale trembling lip. As the panther rusheth from the thicket, to seize the passing prey, Joseph bounded from the chariot, vaulted on a led horse, and encouraged the menials to stand by their noble patrons. The Arabs charged them with resolution and vigour; animated by the intrepidity of our hero, the Egyptians returned the charge, and sent amongst them a score of winged deaths, every arrow marked by fate. Then Joseph clapping spurs to his horse, rode up to the enemy, and with his sabre divided the head of Mezero, their captain, from his body, and dealt death to many of the Arabs: the servants of Potiphar, fol-

lowing the example of their leader, more than half the banditti were presently dispatched, whilst the rest sought to hide themselves from death by flight. Joseph pursued, and killed many more, as they strove to fly from his avenging arm. Sabrina being somewhat recovered, Potiphar himself flew to the assistance of his guard, fierce as the lion ravaging for prey; but the work was done, and the enemy discomfited, ere he could arrive. Sabrina, from the chariot, beheld the heroic fortitude of the gallant Hebrew, as he raged along the ranks of the enemy; and every wound he inflicted upon them was as oil poured into the latent flame.

The grateful soul of the young patriarch rejoiced at having it in his power to manifest the sense which he had of their goodness, by exerting himself in their defence, in a season of difficulty and danger. With modesty he received Potiphar's caresses, who presented him to his lady, as her friend and deliverer. His address to his mistress was full of duty, gratitude, and affection; all which encouraged her to hope that he was smote with the same guilty passion with herself, and made her half resolve, at a time convenient, to come to an avowal. Again she resolved to wait yet farther, to see whether his confession would save her from confusion.

BOOK III.

Syrena comforts her mistress by promising success to her amour—She strives to entice him in vain—She persuades her lady to an avowal—His mistress confesseth her love—Solicits his embrace—To divert her attention from it, he relates the story of Eve eating the forbidden fruit—Applies it to his mistress, with a view to reanimate her virtue—He relates his sister's ravishment, and its fatal consequences—Her silence and discontent at his coldness—Consults her nurse, who encourageth her to persist—She commandeth Joseph to her chamber—Strives to win him by persuasion—Then to force him—He flies from her, and leaves his scarf behind—Her love turns to rage and hatred—She accuseth him of an attempt upon her honour—He is imprisoned.

SYRENA, a person well skilled in all the wily mazes of woman kind, was governess to Sabrina in her virgin years, and now attended her in the capacity of waiting-woman. She alone was intrusted with the fatal secret; her mistress having had full proof of her readiness to concur in any measures to gratify her inclination. She consoled her mistress, and flattered her passion, by assuring her, that as far as she could dive into the secrets of a youthful heart, Joseph was glowing with a passion at least equal with her own. She could read it well in his looks and in his sighs. For, amidst all his prosperity, Joseph could not help sighing after his guilty brethren, and his distressed honourable father, from whose embraces he was banished without cause. She promised to use all her wisdom to serve her mistress, and did not doubt by her prudent management to bring the blooming Hebrew to her fond embraces. As he was one day in his office settling his master's accounts, Syrena entered, and having shut the door, she thus accosted him: "Master Joseph, be idle who will, we are always sure to find you in your business. Indeed, master Joseph, our lord is happy in having such a servant as yourself. I do not wonder that both he and my lady have such a high esteem for you." "I tell you, Mrs. Syrena," replied Joseph, "I do nothing but what is my duty. My honourable master and lady have a right to my best services, and I should be shamefully wanting in my duty to God, to them, and myself, if I did not study to my utmost to promote their honour, advantage, and delight." "I am glad, sir," replied Syrena, "that your virtuous sentiments concur so exactly with my own. And I can tell you, Mr. Joseph,

that more tenderness is due from you to your amiable mistress, than perhaps you are aware of."—"I know," said he, "that my lady is amiable and virtuous, and merits my humblest regard; which I shall ever be ready to render her with the utmost pleasure." "She is virtuous," said Syrena, "and yet I can tell you Joseph, she cannot help being sensible of your attractions, and entertaining the fondness of affection for you. I wrung the painful secret with the greatest difficulty from her lips; and you, my friend, may avail yourself of your happiness, and embrace a favour which she would deny to any but yourself, was he even the first prince of the blood." Rejoined the patriarch, "My master and mistress are daily loading me with favours which I am altogether unworthy of; I believe their readiness to add more as occasion may offer; but the lip that would insinuate so much as a hint contrary to my mistress's honour, ought to be sealed in everlasting silence."—"Not so fast, sir," returned she, "I tell you she loves you, and longs for your embrace. But I enjoin you to conceal the fatal truth, and improve it to your own advantage." She ended here, and returned to her lady, who waited impatiently the issue of this conversation.

Syrena failed not to enlarge upon her own sagacity and address; she related the converse she had had with Joseph, in the manner which would best flatter her lady's passion; and from the whole she inferred, that it was caution in the Hebrew which caused him to feign ignorance. But she was sure that amidst all his care to conceal it, she could discern flashes of passion dart from his amorous eye, when the name of Sabrina was mentioned. "In short, madam," continued she, "the matter must be between you and him; for I perceive he is so cautious, that he will admit none into the secret besides yourselves. And indeed I cannot blame him, when I consider how false and deceitful the greater part of people are. You know, madam, he is young, and a stranger to intercourse to our sex; and who knows how far modesty may keep him back from an avowal; besides, he may fear your ladyship's resentment, in case your passion should not be answerable to his."

"O Syrena!" replied the wife of Potiphar, "thou knowest that in our sex an avowal is hard, even when the object is lawful; but how much more so must it be when

the object is criminal, and an avowal is the display of our guilt and shame. Yet I would even venture to confess my love to him, could I but hope the haughty youth would embrace my proposal: but, O Syrena! should he refuse it, then should I be undone! His person is amiable and lovely, his conduct affable and polite, his spirit open and benevolent; but his virtue, Syrena! I fear his virtue is inflexible."—"O, madam," replied the swarthy duenna, "no virtue can be proof against such charms as yours. The Hebrew will fall an easy victim, when he is assured of your affection."

Encouraged by the assurances of Syrena, she resolves to abandon shame and modesty at once, and solicit Joseph to her embrace. To this purpose she proposeth an airing, and requires him to attend her, in Potiphar's absence, in her chariot. As they were on the way, with a scarlet blush upon her countenance, and desire sparkling in her eyes, with a faultering voice that bespoke the blackness of her guilt, she said, "Joseph, you cannot be ignorant of my desire for your company; and yet I can tell you, that if your bosom is proof against love, love even to me, I may rue the day that ever I beheld your too amiable face. For I love you, Joseph; my pain forces me to confess my shame; I have trusted my honour in your hand; I hope you will act with your usual gallantry." She said—then leaning her head on his snowy bosom, melted into a flood of tears, which she endeavoured, but in vain, to conceal. Astonished at this open declaration, it was some time before he was capable of speech or reflection.

After a long silence, accompanied with tears upon her part, and heart-felt sighs upon his, not without struggles between corruption and virtue, in broken accents he replied, "Your honour, my lady, is ever safe with your unworthy servant, whose greatest glory is to be faithful to the trust reposed in him. But, before I explain myself upon this matter, will your ladyship give me leave to relate an affair which is better known among the children of Shem than among the descendants of Ham." After leave obtained, with hope of extricating himself from his present difficulty, and working some suitable impression upon the mind of his mistress, he thus began:

"When our first parents, Adam and Eve, originally dropped from the all-forming hand, they were perfectly

free from any bias to evil; not one corrupt inclination possessed their peaceful breasts. This calm serenity, this sweet composure, continued with them as long as they retained their innocence. But, to their sad experience, they ere long found that the effect of guilt is dire alarm and incessant perturbation. Our benevolent Creator was pleased to put the parents of mankind in possession of the paradisaical garden, where a perpetual spring cheered the blessed mound, and every salubrious vegetable. 'All that thine eyes behold, all that the earth produceth, Adam, is thine,' saith the munificent Deity. 'I give thee leave to use thy utmost freedom with all the produce of the earth. One tree, and only one, I forbid thee to touch. Its fertile boughs, indeed, bend low beneath its fruit, which pendant hangs attractive to the eye. This, Adam, is the forbidden tree. These are the fruit, to taste of which is death. Beware of it, man; come not near it, Adam; for on the day thou eatest of it thou shalt surely die.' Incautious Eve, the mother of humanity, in an evil hour was prevailed upon by the arch apostate to eat the prohibited morsel, and awful was the consequence. Having eat thereof herself, she became her husband's first seducer, and drew him, contrary to the light of his own conscience, to partake of her guilt. This done, the horrors of Gehenna tortured their guilty consciences, and they knew not where to fly to shun the threatened death. The evening arrived, the sky had lost its serenity, the beasts their wonted tameness, the flowers lose the greatest part of their fragrance, and all nature seemed to wear a melancholy aspect. On the evening, just as radiant Phœbus concealed himself in the western ocean, the Divine Creator himself comes down into the garden, to call the delinquents to account for their conduct. Awful was the change. They cannot now stand with filial respect and confidence in the sacred presence; much less did they long for the approach of the celestial visitant as heretofore; but basely fly from the face of their Maker, to hide themselves from his researches, whose amiable presence erewhile, they counted the most exalted blessing. Nor did the Eternal himself appear at this time with that friendly and familiar air as before, but with resentment glowing on his awful countenance. The thicket unable to conceal the parents of mankind from the piercing eye of

Omniscience, he arraigns them at his equitable bar, hears their poor defence, and denounceth upon them the fatal sentence. Since then, none may hope to touch forbidden fruit with impunity. You, my lady, are like the interdicted tree. Your amiable personal excellences display themselves in the most alluring manner; but they are forbid the enjoyment of all men, my lord excepted. He alone may approach you with familiarity. He alone may lawfully enjoy. Was I, madam, to dare injuriously to betray my master, and to dishonour his amiable consort, I should act as a villain and ungrateful traitor to the best of masters, and as a rebel against the God of my ancestors, whose tremendous wrath I should thereby awake; and you yourself, madam, upon cool reflection, would curse me for perpetrating the execrable deed. I love you, mistress, and would protect, not dishonour you. I love my honourable lord and would not betray him. I love my God, and would not offend him. Permit me then, madam, to intreat you to stifle a passion so destructive to your honour and tranquillity; which, if indulged, will yield the most bitter reflections, and expose to the greatest dangers."

"Ah, Joseph," replied the wife of Potiphar, "what a well-invented story your icy heart has contrived, in order to evade the honours proffered you? What needless scruples does that whim of religion and virtue inspire you with. What injury would thereby be done to your master, Joseph? I am still his; always ready to oblige him, and should never behave to him with the greater distance. We have nothing to fear, so long as we are prudent enough to conceal our intercourses from the curious eye. I tell you again, I love you, Joseph."

"Madam," returned the Hebrew, "even in my father's family, in the case of my only sister, I have a loud monitor, that bids me beware of the sin of uncleanness."—"I pray now let us have it," said she, "I suppose it is some whimsical religious story, tending to the same purpose."

"It is a truth, madam, the remembrance of which will give occasional sorrow to me to my dying day. My sister, young, amiable, and curious, longing to see more of the world than her father's house admitted of, went forth into a neighbouring principality, at a time when a magnificent festival, in honour of their patron deity, was solemnized.

Amongst the multitude who attended, were Shechem, the young prince of the Hivites, and Tamar his sister. Dinah, young and vain, was attended with a gaudy train selected out of my father's menials, and she herself in elegant apparel. Prince Shechem cast a languishing look upon my sister, conceived a violent passion for her, and resolved at all events to possess her. His sister Tamar was young and beautiful, but unadorned with that amiable virtue which is the greatest glory to her sex. She contracted an intimacy with my sister Dinah, who, unskilled in amorous intrigues, accepted of an invitation to visit the princess Tamar, in the city of Shechem. The day was spent in innocent pleasantry, only every now and then there was something that bordered upon the profane. As the solar orb descended the western hemisphere, Dinah proposed her return to her father, but was put off from time to time, by the prince and princess, till she was at last convinced of her unhappiness, and too late repented the curiosity that led her forth to see the daughters of the land. She was not to be won with prayers and intreaties, therefore was forced to a compliance with his lewd desires, and for a time continued a prisoner to the prince's affection, within his palace. Still he loved her with increasing fervour, and his very soul clave to the unhappy damsel. So courteous, affable, and loving was his conduct to her, after he had defiled her, that she half forgave the injury, and conceived something like affection for him. His love grew stronger every day; and finding that he could not live without her company on the one hand, nor his affection permit him to use her like a harlot on the other, he implored the good offices of king Hamor his father, to procure her for him in lawful marriage. From motives of policy, the old king readily complied, proposed to his courtiers the desires of his son, and then made suit unto Israel for his consent. My father called a council descended from his loins, to deliberate on the proposal of Hamor; and the issue was, that unless the subjects of that prince would conform to the laws of the Hebrews, they would not consent, but would rescue their sister by force of arms, or perish in the attempt. This communicated to Hamor and Shechem, they made no difficulty of complying with the condition. A public festival was appointed, to be observed by all ranks of the

people, to solemnize the marriage of Shechem and Dinah: on the first day of which every male was circumcised, in compliance with the Hebrews, and the carnival greatly inflamed the blood, and enervating their minds, they fell an easy prey to the premeditated revenge of my brethren. Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, selected a choice band out of Israel's domestic retinue, and, clad in arms, before the dawn of the third morning of the festival, came intrepidly upon the city, and filled it with fearful carnage. King Hamor and his son, hearing the cry of murder from all quarters, alarmed the household troops, but, ere they could make resistance, met with death in the gates of the palace royal. The city they reduced to ashes, and slew every man within it. This horrid slaughter and conflagration all arose from the unlawfulness of Shechem's love. Had he observed the rules of virtue, and proposed honourable terms to the Patriarch, he would no doubt accepted of the alliance. But uncleanness is not to be tolerated in the house of Israel. Now, my honourable lady, consider the difference between my lord Potiphar, first of Pharaoh's martial-train, and these simple Hebrew swains. If they could pour out desolation upon the metropolis of a kingdom, in revenge of their sister's dishonour, what might not my lord do, was any villain to dare audaciously to defile his honourable bed, and violate the chastity of his betrothed lady? Far be it from Joseph, madam, to entertain a thought so treacherous to either you or my lord."

She replied not, but disappointed in her love, continued the rest of the time full of silent discontent: her troubled mind agitated with different passions, gave place alternately to love, fear, and hateful revenge; but the more that Joseph saw the agitations of her mind, the more steadily was his own heart fortified by virtue. Arrived at the palace, she retired to her chamber, to consult with her nurse Syrena what farther should be done; and afflicted Joseph went to his apartment, to implore the protection of Jacob's God.

Syrena gave it as her opinion, that fear or modesty must needs be the cause of Joseph's refusal of an offer, that did so much honour to a favourite menial; alleging, that her mistress's graces were sufficient to thaw the frigidity of even old age itself: and advised that a farther trial should be

made ere she gave up her hopes. Pharaoh's birth-day was now at hand, and the general must repair to court, to compliment his majesty, and assist upon the grand occasion; but Sabrina was taken extremely ill in the morning, with a palpitation of heart, and great depression of spirits, and therefore could not attend him to the court. Her lord no sooner gone with his retinue, than she sends Syrena to command Joseph to attend her pleasure in her chamber. Slow of pace, and with a reluctant heart, he came and stood at a formal distance from her, while in thoughtful silence she sat, her eyes intently fixed on his blushing face. "And are you at last come," said she, "ungrateful youth, to scorn and slight your over-fond mistress. Come nearer, sir, and let me speak with freedom to you; for you and I must be better acquainted before we part. It would have been better for you, and more becoming your character and station, to have complied at once with my former request, if it had only been out of respect to the dignity of my station, and the violent excess of my passion; and not have suffered me to undergo the shame of repeating my solicitations, and condescending to express myself in term too strong for female modesty to utter without a blush. But I am willing to put the most favourable construction upon your conduct, and will not only make all possible allowances for it, but endeavour to remove out of the way every thing that would protract our pleasure. Perhaps, Joseph, you might entertain some suspicion, whether I was really in earnest at our last interview, or if I did not make that humble prostration of myself to you, on purpose to try your virtue. But assure yourself that I was in earnest, as my repeating of the same request might abundantly serve to demonstrate. But I'll tell you more Joseph, and what would undo me, was it known by any but ourselves. This day I feigned myself sick, on purpose to be at home with you. The jollity of courtly parade is nothing to me compared to your sweet company. Now you may, if you will, see that I can part with the company of nobles and princes, for the love I bear to your amiable person, my Joseph. And shall I languish and pine without any hope of comfort, when it is in your power, my dear friend, to relieve me? Do not talk any more to me of those holy ties of religion, those severe rules of virtue. Virtue is a mere

imaginary thing, that can bring no pleasure, but only distract the heart with terror. And what is religion, but a dream, as the lives of all our priests testify; for however they cry out against the sins of the times, when in the pulpit, there are none that relish gay delights better than they in private? Could thy God, my Joseph, delight in making thee behave cruelly to one that loves thee, he were to be detested instead of adored? Beware, Joseph, and not father thy indifference to me upon the gods; rather own that some happy, unstained nymph has captivated your affections, and that for her sake you cannot, you dare not oblige your mistress. But cannot you be her's and mine too? But, oh! your honour is concerned. Pray where is my honour in thus humbly suing to you my friend? But what is honour? merely fantastic and precarious. Honour is certainly to ease the pains of those that love us."

"Oh, madam!" returned he, with a sigh sufficient to rend his loins, "what avails a momentary pleasure, that soon must be devoured by keen remorse! Once done it cannot be recalled, let the repentance be ever so poignant. Concealed by these curtains will not secure us from the fears of discovery and disgrace. I might indeed join with you to dishonour my lord, and for a moment we might riot in the pleasures of sense. But, alas! what would this be in comparison of the solid pleasures of a good conscience? Equal, if not superior delights are lawful to you in your marriage relation to him, to whom you gave yourself. And where can a man be found more amiable, and more desirable for a bosom companion, than my lord? Think, my lady, how far what you propose would debase you below your rank, to come to a level with your poor servant, whom you may at all times command in every thing lawful. No, madam, I assure you, I cannot consent to a deed so base, as wilfully to injure the benevolent Potiphar, dishonour the God of my fathers, and bring an indelible stain on the family of Israel. Far from being like idols of stocks and stones, my God sees our most secret actions; he hears our softest whispers, and tries the deepest recesses of thought. Urge me not, madam, for I cannot commit this great wickedness in the sight of my God." He ended here, and she full of resentment replied—

"It might have been sufficient, modestly to have refused

the offer, which the excess of my passion urged me to make, without upbraiding me with shame. This argues impudence, joined with an unrelenting heart; but I leave it for you to choose—whether you will kindly embrace your own happiness, and render happy her that loves you to distraction, or to stand the shock of my revenge; for revenged I will be: these charms, for which princes have sighed in vain, are not to be slighted with impunity. No, sir, never think of it. I shall certainly accuse you to your master of having attempted my dishonour; and a dry ostentation of virtue, the most solemn protestations of innocence, will not then deliver you from the fangs of punishment."

O Joseph! never was virtue assaulted like thine—never did youth more gloriously triumph over temptation. Neither prayers, tears, nor threatenings, upon her part, compassion nor terror upon thine, could alter the purposes of thy determined virtue, and make thee yield to the importunity of a dishonest appetite. Amiable youth! how swelled thy noble heart with generous pity for thy betrayed master, and with grief for thy fallen mistress! Even the danger that on all hands surrounded thee, could not stem the chrystal tide that flowed down thy manly cheeks; whilst Sabrina sat with her eyes fixed upon thee—eyes sparkling both with love and revenge.

Mistaken woman! she interprets Joseph's tears in her own favour, and bent on completing her own shame, she lays hold on him, and threw herself on the bed, saying, "Come, Joseph, let us enjoy the present moment, whilst kindness gently flows through your yielding heart."

"No, madam," replied the steady youth, "dungeons and gibbets are no objects of my fear; criminal converse with a forbidden object; injuring my master and offending my God, are what I justly fear; and I am in danger of them all whilst I am in your company; but I abhor the deed, and I fly from the place of temptation." So saying, he turned hastily about, freed himself from her embrace, and rushed from the room. Her lust grown to a fury, unbridled, she strove to pull him upon the bed, when disentangling the diamond which buttoned his purple scarf, he left it in her possession, and so escaped the snare.

The noble youth departed obstinate in virtue; she was miserably distracted between the sting of her disappointed

love and the fear of her being discovered: but she soon resolved the ruin of him, who had goodness enough not to ruin her, even at her own request. She cried aloud, as if in imminent danger, and nurse Syrena, who guessed at the cause, flew to her assistance. She found her sitting upon a bed, Joseph's scarf lying by her, and deeply bathed in tears. "O what shall I do, Syrena," cried she, "the scornful Hebrew despiseth my passion, and fled but just now from me, with as much horror as if I had been a cockatrice. Go, nurse, alarm the house, and have him seized; for I will swear an attempt of ravishment against him. Befriend me now but this once, my dear Syrena, and I am your friend for ever." The household alarmed, Joseph is seized and kept in confinement till Potiphar's return, which was in the evening. He went directly to his spouse's chamber to inquire after her health, where he found her in the utmost disorder and confusion, with the rage of her disappointed lust. Struck with astonishment, he kindly inquired the cause of her disorder.

"Alas! my lord," said this daughter of deceit, "we have nourished up a viper to sting us; a wretch that will undo us, if permitted under the roof. The insolent Hebrew, forgetting his wretchedness when you was pleased to take him under your protection, and the friendly entertainment we have given him since he lived with us; not content with being the sole disposer of all your possessions, aspireth to your bed. I was laid down to take a little slumber at noon, when the fellow came audaciously into my chamber, and explained his beastly design. I chid his impudent lewdness, and charged him to be gone that instant, or I would inform you of his conduct; but, instead of departing, the villain laid hold on me, and by force would have obtained his filthy purpose, had I not alarmed the house with my cries. When he found me inflexible, and heard the cries of my distress, he hasted away in such disorder, that he left his scarf behind him; a sure testimony of his villainy. My lord, you have professed to love me: if you do, you will revenge the insult offered to my honour, by inflicting the most exemplary punishment upon this insolent wretch. I shall never be able to endure the sight of him again about the house."

Highly delighted with the virtue and probity of his

lady, and astonished at the effrontery of the Hebrew, he commanded Joseph to be brought pinioned into his presence, and with a countenance stern as the face of war, thus accosted him. "Wretch! what pity is it that thy outside, and undaunted air, should belie such a base and diabolical heart. I blame myself, wretch, that I ever sheltered thee under my roof, and placed such a villain at the head of my affairs. But thy vile hypocrisy would deceive those that are even but a few degrees better than thyself; well then might thy saintly shew gain upon my artless heart, a stranger to treachery, and black design. Wouldest thou, viper, bite the hand that feeds thee, and poison the bosom that nourished thee? Was it not enough that I had put my all into thy untrusty hands, but thou must aspire even to my bed? A gloomy dungeon shall supersede the purple bed to which thou aspiredst; and rattling chains shall serve instead of the soft caresses of unlawful love. Away with the slave to his destined dwelling, till I have time to meditate some unheard-of punishment for his baseness!" The same virtue that preserved the pious Hebrew, in the time of temptation, from the guilty deed, preserved him now from fearing the threats of his master; wherefore, with a steady and undaunted air, he replied, "Dungeons and chains, my lord, I can defy, nor can even the approach of death at all disturb the peace of my heart; but your displeasure, my lord, I cannot sustain. The hatred of my kind and generous master, once my avowed friend, is worse than a thousand deaths. But, remember it, Potiphar, Joseph is clear from the guilt charged against him; and his own conscience cannot accuse him of so much as a dishonest thought of this kind. I believe in God. The God of my father, in due time, will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness in clearing up my innocence, and exposing to infamy the baseness of my accusers, of what rank soever they be."—He said, and instantly was conducted to jail, with a strict charge to the keeper, to lade him with the heaviest irons, and to shut him up in the closest ward.

BOOK IV.

Gabriel ascends to heaven to receive fresh instructions—Rachel and Thirzah the wife of Shem, descend, and comfort him unperceived—Potiphar, called in a hurry to fight the Ethiopians, forgets Joseph—Their discourse—Chorion, the jailor, has a dream that impresseth his mind with tenderness—The night following sees a heavenly apparition go to Joseph's apartment—Gabriel appears to Joseph, instructs and comforts him—The jailor's reverence for Joseph—He gets acquainted with the king's butler and baker—Their dreams—The butler's interesting history—The good interpretation of his dream—The fatal interpretation of the baker's dream—His former villany and murder—An apparition of his murdered brother—The butler's restoration to his office—Joseph falls in love with an unknown princess—The baker's execution—Sabrina's passion for Joseph rekindles.

Gabriel, appointed guardian to the banished Joseph, industriously strove to fortify his youthful mind against the attacks of wickedness. Seeing now the issue, he ascended swifter by far than the forked lightnings, to the regions of eternal day, to receive instructions from the universal Governor, what to do in favour of his beloved charge. Meanwhile Rachel, Joseph's mother, and Thirzah, the wife of Shem, riding on a golden cloud, were taking a tour through this part of the universe; and seeing the lovely youth conducted to prison, they descended low, and breathed ambrosial fragrance into the dungeon, a little to mitigate his sorrow. "O Thirzah," said Jacob's departed spouse, "how deep and intricate are the ways of the Almighty to us, whilst in a state of dark mortality? Who could, from his present circumstances, think that in the divine purpose my Joseph should be placed at the head of his brethren from whom he is separated? Who could suppose that the lovely prisoner is to be the future protector of the chosen seed? The archers have indeed galled thee sore, my son, but thy bow has still abode in its strength; by the mighty God of thy father Jacob shall the arms of thy hands be made strong, and these thine enemies shall yet bow down unto thee. O Jacob! thou dear, thou honourable man. What pangs would wring thy sorrowful heart, didst thou but know the agonies of thy beloved! But thou art soothed under the kind deception, believing his pain long since to have been finished. His supposed death gave thee less sorrow by far, than his present life would bring upon thee. Faith and patience, possess ye the heart of my darling, till

he ascend triumphant over his enemies."—" O my Rachel! my dearest daughter," returned the wife of Shem, " we have even seen, that whom the holy and allwise God designs for eminent usefulness, he trains them up in the rough school of adversity. The afflictions my lovely descendant endures will endue him with sympathy for the distressed: even when ascended to the government of the kingdom, thy chains, Joseph, will make thy grandeur to sit more graceful upon thee. The false accusations laid against thee, will teach thee the necessity of caution and impartiality in the administration of justice. Persevere in virtue, my son; take kindly the rough means by which thy heavenly Father instructest. The end shall crown the work, and fill thy heart with gratitude, and thy mouth with praise." Thus the two mothers conversed together, after the manner of disembodied spirits, and gently moved forward upon their cloudy chariot, leaving the perfumes of life behind them.

Chorion, the jailor, had just secured his new prisoner in irons, made fast the prison, and retired to rest, when he fell into a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by the following dream:—He supposed himself in a widely extended field, ruminating on the beauties which everywhere decorated the teeming earth. Walking slowly along, a yearling lamb, closely pursued by a couple of wolves, ran up to him and fell down at his feet, as if supplicating protection. Unintimidated, the she wolf came rushing forward, and with bloody fangs, was for devouring the innocent even before his face, whilst he drew his sabre to defend the fugitive. In the midst of the scuffle betwixt him and the ravenous monster, he awoke with an impression upon his mind, that some prisoner under his care was personated by the lamb, persecuted by enemies, who eagerly thirsted for his blood, and hoped to find that safety and friendship in the cells of a prison, which were denied him where he had a right to expect it. Chorion was none of the savage herd, who have in later times kept watch at the doors of prison-houses. He had a humane heart; capable of feeling the distresses of his fellow-creatures. The necessary strictness and severity of his office was always performed with a reluctant hand, and with inward sensations becoming a descendant of Adam.

The dream was suggested at Gabriel's request, by one

of the benevolent ethereal spirits, with a view to render Chorion as gentle as might be to Joseph, during the absence of his guardian angel, who upon his account, was ascended to the empyreum. It had its desired effect; for the cautious jailor, for fear that he should add to the sufferings of the innocent, was extremely gentle and tender to all his prisoners.

The following night, having spread the thickest darkness over all the land, neither moon nor star embellished the concave sky. As Chorion stood upon his tower, he saw at a distance, darting through the air, a form divinely beautiful and fair, surrounded with glory, almost too strong for his visual orbs to sustain, and followed by a train of stupendous splendour, which evidently bespoke the visitant to be of celestial lineage. As he drew near, and went past the keeper to the prison, he had as good a view as his confusion would suffer him to take. For Joseph's sake, the friendly angel thought proper to favour Chorion with a glimpse of ethereal brilliance, and but a glimpse, lest he should, by too rich a display of celestial excellence, overturn the reasoning powers of his mind. Some heavenly deity, cried Chorion, in a rapture; some god, who defends virtue and innocence, propitious to the cries of distress, condescends to visit the loathsome cells of a miserable prison. See, he is gone directly to the stranger's apartments. The youth is innocent of whatever he is accused of; the holy gods will not condescend to visit the guilty. This is the lamb that fled to me for protection. O lovely youth, as far as poor Chorion's influence can go, ye shall meet with nothing but friendship within these walls. I will ease you of your chains, and provide suitable apartments for your reception.

Meanwhile Gabriel stood confessed in Joseph's cell, and even groaned to see the son of Israel encumbered with horrid chains. Secretly he gave him a celestial draught just drawn from the fountain of life, which enabled him with pleasure to bear the heavenly radiance with which he was arrayed. "Fear not, Joseph," said the splendid messenger, "I am Gabriel, of whom thou hast often heard. Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Lord. This is the first time, indeed, of my appearing to thee, but thou hast long been my careful charge. It was I that sent Abel

thy kinsman to comfort thee when thou wast in the pit. I stood by with unspeakable pleasure, and beheld the noble resistance you made to the temptations of your mistress; and rejoiced to see you come off a conqueror from danger so fatal. Your present afflictions, my Joseph, are not the fruit of guilt on your part. They are such as you shall be delivered from. But, O! what keen remorse would have torn your heart, had you been left, Joseph, to sin so sadly against your God! From some inkling which the infernal spirits had got of the designs of your God towards you, they are leagued together to destroy you; and two of the most active of the damned race, as agents for the rebellious community, undertook to accomplish your ruin. Belphegar and Adramelech, they stirred up your brethren against you, and had not I interposed, your blood would have been sacrificed to their malice. Little did they know that the very means which they took to frustrate the designs of grace, were appointed directly to promote them; and that whilst they were gratifying their own infernal malice, they were doing what should be overruled to your advantage. They inflamed your mistress with a burning desire to enjoy your embraces, and turned her love into hatred and rage upon being disappointed. And it was them who inspired Potiphar with the rash design of destroying you. Thus far they have been divinely permitted to persecute you, Joseph. But here ends the bounds of their permission. Trust in the God of thy fathers. Let patience have its perfect work; for when thou art tried, thou shalt come forth as purified gold. Grieve not for your father, for you shall yet see him in a strange land; and these hands of yours shall close his aged eyes, after ye have received the paternal benediction from his prophetic lips. Potiphar will soon have his attention attracted by other objects, so that he shall not touch your life; you will yet see him, and embrace him as your friend; for Sabrina shall one day be made to confess her guilt. I leave you, Joseph, but remember ye the God of your fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart. I have prejudiced the keeper much in your favour. The peace of the everlasting covenant be with you." So saying, he shrouded himself in darkness, and the young patriarch saw him no more. But, O! what pleasure did the seraph's melodious voice cause to thrill

through the heart of the prisoner! Even in a prison he was wrapt up in the suburbs of heaven. As soon as the morning began to dawn, Chorion, the keeper, from whose eyes sleep had been banished all the night, visited every apartment in the prison, and when he came to Joseph's cell, he stood motionless with awful reverence of his prisoner; and as soon as he could speak, with a faultering voice he said, "I am sorry, sir, that you have been so ill-used. I wish I had known your desert before, then these servile chains should not have disgraced your limbs." So saying, he took off his irons, led him up to his own apartments, and treated him with the utmost respect.

That very day a courier from the frontiers of the kingdom arrived at the war-office, with advice that the Ethiopians, then a warlike people, had invaded those parts of the empire most contiguous to them; wherefore Potiphar was dispatched at the head of the army to put a stop to their ravages; an expedient that took off his attention from Joseph, and kept him long at a distance from Memphis; during which time, our injured hero continued a prisoner, neglected and forgotten. But the same divine and ever watchful Providence which prospered him in the house of Potiphar, followed him still in the house of his prison, and succeeded all the works of his hands.

Amongst the many prisoners that were confined for different crimes were Florillo, the king's principal cup-bearer, and Labonah, the chief baker. Having received charge of all the prisoners from Chorion, the keeper, Joseph frequently visited them, and soon contracted an intimacy with them. Making his morning visit to Florillo and Labonah one day, after he had been a year in prison, he found a pensive sadness louring upon their heavy countenances. "What is the matter with you, my friends?" said he; "It appears by your countenances that your hearts are sorrowful. May I beg to know the cause? If any thing within my power can be of service to you, my assistance may be depended upon."—"Alas, sir," replied the butler, "assistance can come from the immortal gods alone. Our case seems to be beyond the arm of humanity to remedy. Each of us have had a dream ominous of some important event, but what it may portend is to us a secret, involved in the most cloudy mystery."

Joseph observed, that dreams are not always to be regarded, and even such as are significant and ominous must have their interpretation from heaven. "Will you tell me your dreams?" said he, "for some I have interpreted; and I promise you at least I will not deceive you. But it would add greatly to the kindness, if you would give me with your dreams some account of your past lives, and I, in my turn, will freely communicate to you every material part of my own history."

"I am," said the butler, "the only son of Arba, an Elamite, who dying when I was very young, left me under the care and direction of Athgar, my uncle by the mother's side. The tender and delicate usage which I experienced from my parents was changed into rough and vigorous treatment by my uncle; and although so very young, I was made to feel the difference between paternal affection and the guardianship of the nearest kinsman. Possessed of my father's substance, which he was to husband to my advantage, he relished the sweets of it so much, that he entertained thoughts of keeping it as his own property, and took care to let me know that I was solely dependant upon him for the means of my subsistence. Conscious that in a land of oppression, where my uncle had principal rule, there was little prospect of power giving place to equity, I was obliged for my own safety patiently to bear my injuries; imagining, upon no ill ground, that complaint of the grievances I suffered would only add to the weight of my oppressions. It was not long before Cushi, an enterprising prince of a neighbouring people, upon some slight pretence quarrelled with the king of Elam, and invaded his territories. I was sent to the war by my uncle's command, and I had reason to fear with a view to rid me out of the way. But you may think that I had but little heart to fight in defence of a land where I had suffered such base oppression. Our army was far from being either spirited or disciplined like the Hummins under Cushi. The Elamites of distinction wallowed in luxury, whilst those of inferior rank groaned under oppression. Therefore, when they came to face the enemy, they could make but a faint resistance, and soon sought for safety in rapid flight. Many were cut to pieces as they fled, and many were taken prisoners by the Hummins, amongst

whom I was one. It was my lot to be brought to Memphis, and sold to one of the stewards of Pharoah's household; and I must say in honour of my lord, that I have met with more hospitable friendship, although a slave in the royal palace, than I ever received under my uncle's roof, where my own property should have procured me welcome.

"But the barbarous man did not long enjoy either my estate or his own; for the Elamites, unable ever to stand before the Hummins, Cushi soon became master of the whole kingdom, and divided it among his faithful followers. Meanwhile I was put into the lowest and most servile office in the palace; which was much more agreeable to me than to live near to a kinsman, who had in my person violated all the laws of hospitality. My advancement was by slow degrees from one place to another, till it pleased his majesty to enfranchise me, and place me near his person. I had long served in the capacity of cup-bearer, when his majesty was taken with a violent disorder in the viscera, which his physicians judged to be the effect of poison; and as I had the inspection of all the wine which he drank, and my friend Labonah of all the fruits and baked meats presented at the royal table, we were by special order seized and committed to prison till farther orders. But far be it from Florillo so much as to wish the least inconvenience to his royal master. May Heaven preserve the life of Pharoah, to be a blessing to the land, whatever becomes of me. Last night I had a dream which greatly disturbs me, apparently big with some important event. I thought there was a vine before me, which divided itself into three luxuriant branches, each of which blossomed, budded, and brought forth the most delightful grapes that I had ever beheld, and that in the greatest plenty. I thought that I took of the grapes that were fully ripe, and pressed them into Pharoah's onyx cup, and presented to him the most mellow and best flavoured wine that I remembered ever to have seen. His majesty drank the wine, and smiling, said, he hoped I would always procure him such wine as this; upon which I awoke full of anxiety about the event."

"My friend," said the son of Jacob, "for your having drank of the cup of affliction, entitles you to that endearing appellation, you may make yourself very easy about your dream; for the God of heaven, who regards the cry of the

oppressed, sends you by me a good interpretation of it. Before you was a luxuriant vine, a gift of God to undeserving men, the fruit of which composeth differences, creates friendship, dissolves care and melancholy, and turns our sadness into joy. The three branches are three days, which shall be productive of great events in your favour; for, on the third day, the king shall raise you up out of the prison, restore you to your office, to the good graces of your master, and to the glowing embrace of your wife and children. I beg, Florillo, that you may think of me. I have undergone oppressions, at least equal to yours, and am here unjustly confined, for preferring my own, and my master's honour, to the brutal pleasures of the flesh. It will be easy for you, when ye regain your master's confidence, to make mention of me to him, and procure my release."

Labonah, the cook, having heard the favourable interpretation of his companion's dream, and hoping that his would be equally so, began and related it to Joseph as follows: "I thought I had upon my head three baskets made of the whitest osier, filled with provision for Pharoah's table: in the first basket was bread, made of the kidney of the finest wheat; in the second were all manner of tasteful viands; and in the third and uppermost were savoured baked meats, such as my master loveth; but in spite of all my care, as I passed along, I could not preserve my charge from the rapine of the filthy birds, which eat the baked meats out of the uppermost basket."—"I pity your circumstances, my friend," said Joseph, "and wish it was in my power to give comfort to you: but your fate, alas! is determined. The baskets are three days; yet within three days, the king will order you to be beheaded, after which your body will be hanged on a gibbet, and the birds of the air will eat the flesh from off your bones; nor will it be in your power to shun the threatening evil. What you have done to deserve it, I know not; but such is the decree of unerring Providence. Let me therefore advise you to make confession to the God of heaven, implore his mercy to pardon your sins, and grace to fit you for another world; for you have little more than two days to live in this. Let your case be ever so desperate, with him there is mercy and plenteous redemption to them who call upon him."

"I see, then," returned Labonah, "that judgment and

justice sleepeth not, but sometimes overtakes the offender, and when he thinks himself most secure. I am indeed clear from every bad design upon Pharaoh. A thought of poisoning him never entered my mind. Yet I exasperated him, when I found myself arrested without a cause, and wished the deed to have been done, of which I was accused, that I might have had something worthy of imprisonment and death. But this was only the effect of ungovernable passion; though, according to the law of Egypt, it will be deemed high treason, and worthy of death. But, alas! although I account myself in this to be innocent, it is long since I merited the death now to be inflicted on me. So that however iniquitous I account the sentence of Pharoah, that of the gods is just. I am a Lybian by birth. Obed, my father, left my elder brother and I possessed of his whole estate, which was very considerable. Osmyn, my brother, was industrious and frugal, by which means he greatly increased his wealth, gained the friendship of his superiors, and the veneration of people of lower birth. For my own part I minded nothing but pleasure, and those were my choicest companions who were the greatest voluptuaries. By these means my wealth was impaired, and I brought to wish my niggardly brother, as I then called him, out of the way, that I might possess myself of his estates. Glad would I have been if some fatal accident had clipped the thread of his life asunder; but it was long before I could come to the resolution of destroying him myself. However, at last, by the advice of a lewd woman I gave him a poison that stole insensibly into the mass of blood, and by slow degrees stopped up the springs of life. It was long before its effects became apparent, though at last it put a period to his days, and I took possession of his estate, as being his heir at law. Some years I lived in the quiet enjoyments of the fruits of my brother's toil, and of my own unrighteousness, when an unhappy circumstance obliged me to leave all behind, and seek for safety in a foreign country.

Having contracted an intimacy with the wife of a considerable man in the neighbourhood, I had the misfortune to stay later than usual one evening when the husband was not expected to come home; but, to our utter confusion, he entered the chamber, and found us conversing criminally

together. How nearly, alas! is one evil allied with another. To conceal our shame, and prevent him from obtaining legal redress, I rose in a fury, flew to my poignard, and plunged it into his breast before he had time to reflect upon his own dishonour. As I had perpetrated the horrid deed, I hastened from the scene of murder, and retired to rest in my own apartment. In the third watch of the night, I was surprised by a supernatural light, which darted into my chamber, and illuminated every corner of it. Unused to such a phenomena, my blood froze in my veins, my hair stood upright on my head, and all the horrors of my guilt stared me in the face. The light increased, and I clearly saw my brother Osmyn, clad in celestial attire, standing by my bedside, whilst he thus addressed me: "Wretched Labonah, will thy murdering hand never be tired with shedding innocent blood? Was it not enough to possess yourself of my estate, by murdering of me, but you must go and violate your neighbour's bed? And, was it not enough that you robbed him of his honour, and his wife of her virtue, but, like a villain inured to bloodshed, you must drench your thirsty sword in his honourable blood? Do not ye fear the awful God, who hates injustice and violence, and with whom no unrepenting murderer can dwell? Can you spare no time from your riot and wantonness, to think but a little of the tremendous audit, to which you will soon be called? Can you bear an eternity of unspeakable torment, rather than forego your sensual gratifications? It is an awful choice, Labonah, yet that choice seems to be yours. Arise, guilty man, arise and flee to some foreign country, where the vengeance of man will not be able to reach thee. But, remember, the vengeance of God will follow thee even there, and bring thee to condign punishment, both in this life and that which is to come, unless thou repentest of, and forsakest thy vicious habits." So saying, the vision departed; and as soon as somewhat recovered from my fright, I collected all my money and jewels, and instantly departed for Egypt; in which kingdom I went through many scenes, too tedious to mention, before I rose to the dignity of my late station. Too late I now see, that honour and integrity shall preserve them who are guided thereby; and that however pleasant sen-

sual intelligences for the present may be, the end of them is bitter as wormwood."

Early on the third morning a chariot rolled up to the gates of the prison, in which was a reverend old men, whose silver hairs hung down in graceful ringlets upon his shoulders; he was come as Florillo's friend, with special order to restore the cup-bearer to his dignity. Along with this senior prince, Joseph beheld a young lady, who gave him much uneasiness afterwards. She was the beauteous virgin, Asenath, the only daughter of the prince of On, who was also high priest of Heliopolis. An artless modesty greatly improved the native elegance and matchless graces of her outward form. Her cheeks were a lovely mixture of the rose and lily, and her eyes a sprightly blue. Her hair in careless elegance descended low, and partly covered the strings of jet and pearl which adorned her comely neck. The first sight of her wounded the youthful son of Jacob, and kindled an uneasy, unknown passion in his heart. Till now he never had felt the vacuum left in his breast for his other self. But now the damsel had fixed her empire in his heart, and the lovely image of the fair unknown wantonned perpetually before his eyes, whilst he languished for the absent substance. But hopeless was his passion; he is a prisoner, accused of a capital transgression of the laws, and she a person of elevated rank. This, this, he cried, must confound all my hopes, and I, alas, must languish under a wound incurable!

Florillo replaced in his office, a guard arrived at the king's command, and conducted despairing Labonah to the place of execution, where Joseph's prediction was amply verified upon him. But the courtier, advanced again to favour, forgot the friendship of Joseph the prisoner.

Sabrina's rage had long subsided; her deadly hate turned into female tenderness and kind relentings. Her thoughts repentant, accuse her rashness. And O her heart is pierced with poignant pain at the thought, that her mad revenge causes him, for whom she lauguishes, to lay in an offensive dungeon: whilst she had it not in her power, without exposing her own shame, to administer the least consolation to the injured victim of her rage, or procure the smallest degree of relief for herself. And thus she lan-

guished away a miserable, dying life at home, whilst Potiphar was dealing slaughter and death among the warlike Ethiopians, and Joseph lay neglected and forgot in prison.

"A deep remorse, from conscience of her sin,
With constant horrors, vext her soul within;
Her thoughts ten thousand racking torments feel,
Yet in her treach'rous crime obdurate still;
Her life and youthful spirits melt away,
Her beauty withers with a swift decay;
By day she wildly raves, consumes the night
In thoughtless watchings, and imagined fright,
While airy terrors glide before her sight;
Pale ghosts with wide distracted eye-balls stare,
And burning spectres through the darkness glare."

BOOK V.

Pharaoh's two prophetic dreams—The convocation of the clergy—The butler confesseth his neglect of Joseph—Informs the king of his sagacity—He is brought into his presence—He interpreteth the dreams—Pharaoh remembers to have seen him in his sleep, as recommended to him as an assisiant in government—He is clothed in rich apparel—Potiphar comes to solicit Joseph's enlargement, Sabrina having confessed the truth to him; he is astonished to find Joseph advanced so near the king—Joseph made lord chancellor of Egypt—Builds granaries for receiving corn The king proposeth a marriage to him—He is greatly perplexed, being in love with an unknown lady—The match is proposed to the princess Asenath, who rejects it; having been in love with the Hebrew who rescued Sabrina from the lion, and not knowing that lord chancellor was he—Their astonishment and joy at meeting, when Joseph finds Asenath to be the lady whom he had loved with such vehemence, and Asenath found her lovely Hebrew to be the very person designed for her—The death of Judah's sons; it renews his sorrow for his violence to Joseph.

THE time of Joseph's suffering elapsed: on the very night before his enlargement, the monarch had two heavenly inspired dreams, which baffled the skill of his diviners. He fancied himself by the side of the river Nile, where the monsters of the flood sport themselves on the oozy shore; he saw seven oxen of an enormous size, fat and well-fed, ascend out of the river, and feed upon the herbage of the neighbouring verdant meadow: afterwards arose seven meagre and ill-looking beasts, upon which there seemed hardly to be flesh enough to keep their bones together; they also went and gazed on the same meadow, and presently devoured all its verdure. Still hungry, they set upon the fat oxen and eat up them likewise, and yet continued lean and hungry as ever. A sight so strange in itself impressed the monarch's mind so deeply, that he awoke in confusion, and sleep departed from his eyes. Towards morning he dreamed again, and lo! he was in the midst of a fertile field, admiring the gifts of Ceres, when to his wonder and surprise there sprang up instantaneously seven of the largest and loveliest ears of wheat that ever the earth produced; and, presently after, there sprang up beside them seven thin and blasted ears, which contained nothing at all but dust and chaff; and, what was very strange, the thin and blasted ears fell upon and devoured the others, yet still continued thin and blasted themselves as before. Such were the dreams of Pharaoh, and the interpretation was given him likewise in his sleep; but, awakening in confusion of mind,

the interpretation was gone, and he retained only the dreams.

Early in the morning he summoned a convocation of all such doctors in the metropolis that were famous for learning in the Egyptian sciences. Each appeared in the habit of his order, trailing behind him the ensigns of his reverence. But all in vain their priestly parade; for the dumb idols which they adored could not speak the interpretation of the mystery. Every priest has recourse to different schemes of augury, and each produced different interpretations from his neighbours; but all of them rejected by the king, who well enough knew that none of them agreed with the interpretation that he had seen in his sleep, although he could not remember it himself. All the attempts of the priests became abortive, and Pharoah's rage kindling against them for their impositions, the cup-bearer recollected his error, hasted before the king and thus humbly addressed him:

"O king, live for ever! I humbly sue for pardon, as I have greatly offended, and have not till now recollected my fault. Your majesty may well remember, that falling under your royal displeasure, the chief baker and I were imprisoned. It came to pass that each of us had a dream on the same night, which greatly troubled us, as no interpretation could be found. I dreamed that before me was a noble vine bearing three luxuriant branches, each of which budded, blossomed, and brought forth large clusters of grapes, which ripened whilst I looked on; I held my lord's onyx cup in my hand, took the grapes and pressed them into it, and gave it into the hands of my lord to drink; your majesty drank, and was highly pleased with the flavour of the wine. The baker also dreamed, and lo! upon his head were three baskets, in the uppermost of which was all manner of baked meat for which Pharoah; and, as he brought them to the royal table, the birds of heaven descended and eat the meats out of the basket, nor could he keep them away. The next morning, as we sat sad and sorrowful, an amiable young man, an Hebrew, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, and who is there unjustly confined, came in and interpreted both our dreams according to the event. The happy Florillo he restored to his master's favour; but the wretched Labonah he hanged. Will it please my lord the

king to order the young man before you, and I doubt not but he will interpret both of your majesty's dreams."

The impatient monarch immediately ordered Joseph to be brought from prison into the royal presence. Clothed in decent apparel, he came ready prepared to give the king an answer; for Gabriel, his friendly guardian, had appeared to him, and related both the dreams and interpretation of them, and withal gave him suitable instructions relative to the government of Egypt. As he approached the throne with reverence, the eyes of all were attracted by the graces of his person, which were greatly enlivened by the blush of modesty which glowed upon his countenance. He bowed before the monarch and silently waited his commands.

The moment that Pharaoh beheld the face of Joseph, he saw something in his countenance that attracted his friendship: he took him gently by the hand, and said; "There is a servant of mine, who has given you the character of a very wise man, especially in the matter of opening hidden mysteries, of which he says he has had abundant proof in his own experience. I also have my dreams, the interpretation of which is dark and difficult, yet portending some great event." Here he related his dreams, and requested that Joseph would lay aside all fear, and reveal the simple truth, however disagreeable it might seem.

With a calm and serene countenance, yet with an elevated air, that displayed the majestic dignity of his person, he replied.—"Let Pharoah give glory to the God of heaven, who in his great condescension makes kown unto the king what he is about to bring to pass on the earth. The dreams, my lord, were two in form, yet one in substance and signification. The first seven oxen and ears of corn, both mean the same thing, and reveal to Pharoah, that there shall be seven years of such excessive plenty of all sorts of grain, as was never known in any kingdom from the beginning, as appears by the bulk and fatness of the first seven oxen, and the largeness and fulness of the first seven ears of corn. The second seven meagre and ill-looking cattle, and the seven thin and blasted ears, denote also seven years of such scarcity as has never been known in the world, for there shall be neither earing nor harvest; and whereas, the

latter lean and ill-looking cattle, eat up the fat and well-favoured, and the thin and blasted ears devoured those that were ripe and full; it shews that the seven years of plenty will not produce sufficient to supply the seven years of famine, unless the best economy is established in the land. Let my lord the king consider, that the great Governor of all raiseth up certain men to sovereign rule over their fellow-creatures, that they may be as fathers unto them, and provide for their peace, safety, and supply. Thy God, O Pharaoh, who established thy throne, hath not revealed this to thee, with a view to afflict your royal mind, but that by taking proper measures for preserving the luxuriant superfluity of the first seven years, thou mayest be able to supply the wants of thy people, during the seven years of famine, that they perish not with hunger. Wherefore, my advice is, that your majesty look out for some wise and honest man, suitably qualified, and give him a commission for this purpose, that the burden may be the lighter upon the king."

The king looked with admiration upon Joseph all the while he was speaking, astonished to find so much wisdom in a youth; and, as soon as he had done speaking, sprung from the throne, and grasped him in his arms with all the ardour of friendship, and said, "Yes, this is the interpretation, and thou art the man who was presented to me in my sleep, to be my assistant in a work so great: I embrace thee, therefore, as one sent by the God of heaven, to be a saviour to the people. And where, my lords," said he to his courtiers, "shall we find one endued with wisdom and discretion equal to him." Now the butler, who all this time stood by a silent but delighted auditor, came up, and tenderly embraced his quondam friend, begged pardon for his long neglect, and hoped that Joseph would not impute it to want of regard. Joseph told him, that the Lord's time was not till now come.

The king then gave command to the master of his wardrobe, to take Joseph away, and clothe him in superb array. Just as he parted from the king's presence, one of the lords in waiting entered, and informed his majesty, that Potiphar, his general, waited in the hall, and requested a private audience upon matters of great importance. "Let him come in," said the king, "for he is a good man." The king

retired with Potiphar into an anti-chamber, and thus he preferred his suit: "May it please your majesty, immediately before I went by your commission against the Ethiopians, I committed the steward of my house to prison, on my wife's accusing him with an attempt to ravish her; it was, indeed, my intent to have spoke to your majesty to have had him put to death; but, thanks to the gods, the suddenness of the invasion, and the urgency of the king's command, together with my regard for the public good, made me utterly forget my own affairs. My wife, upon my return, hath withdrawn her charge, entreating me to procure his release, and indemnify him for his unjust imprisonment. This favour, therefore, I would humbly entreat your majesty; and, if it is agreeable to take him under your sacred protection, for he is one of the most virtuous and wise of the human race. Glad should I be to enjoy him as my friend and companion in my own house; but circumstances forbid his re-admission there."

The king heard my attention, and rightly suspecting that Joseph was the person in question, ordered him to be brought again into his presence. But how great was Potiphar's surprise, to see his friend, his ill-used Joseph, brought unto the king clothed in purple, with a chain of gold and diamonds about his neck. He stood motionless for some time, then with an agitated voice, he abruptly said, "It is he." And flying to his embrace, he held as if he grew unto him. Joseph, equally astonished on his part to find such a change, said, "I rejoice, my master, once more to embrace you as my friend; and indeed, sir, I never gave you cause to be otherwise."—"I know it, Joseph, I know it," returned he; "but, if his majesty will permit me, I will give you an account how it is that my friendship hath returned to its proper channel.

"You told me, Joseph, on that detested night that I sent you to the dungeon, that the God whom you and your fathers adore, would by some means or other, clear up your innocence, and detect the guilt of your accusers. It is done, my friend; your prediction is fulfilled. Your poor, unhappy mistress has paid dearly for her folly; she is a proper object of your pity; let her then be ever free from your resentment. The accursed nurse, the wretched Syrena, was more to blame than my fond Sabrina; but I was

more to blame than both. How could I think that female virtue could be insensible of your attracting charms? I delighted to present you to her, rejoiced to see her at any time look friendly upon you, not considering the danger to which I exposed my poor unhappy wife. Whereas, I ought to have concealed you entirely from her sight. But I exposed her to the snare, and I wonder not if she was entangled. I grieved to see her beauty fade away like the decaying rose, and all her wonted vivacity changed into a settled melancholy. She lost all taste for pleasure, for amusements, company, or dress; her sleep was unseasonable, and disturbed with distressing dreams. And oft have I heard her in secret, mourning her betrayed and injured lord, Potiphar. Cautious of adding to her distress, I avoided searching into the cause of it; till, last night, she sent for me into her apartment, where she has been for several days confined to her bed, dangerously ill of a fever. "O my lord!" said she, "can you forgive the most wretched creature that ever was confided in by an indulgent and over-credulous husband? I have betrayed you, my lord, and I cannot die without informing you of my guiltiness. Had the injured Hebrew been no more virtuous than Sabrina, your bed had been stained with the vilest pollution."—"What!" cried I, "is he not guilty?"—"No, my lord," returned she, "he is not guilty; his virtue is inflexible. Neither tears, intreaties, nor threats could shake his steady mind. He trusted in his God, and was delivered. I alone am guilty. I conceived an involuntary passion for him the first time you presented him to me. Conscious of its baseness, I did what I could to stifle it; but do what I would, it grew stronger upon me, till it burned as a flame intolerable. Encouraged by my nurse, I gave scope to my wild desires, did all that I could to entice him, but to no purpose. His regard to his God and his master, prevailed over all my charms and snares; and by his stability he hath convinced me, that there is something in piety and virtue, which I am unacquainted with. O, my lord! may I hope to hear the voice of your forgiveness before I depart? And, O! how heartily could I beg forgiveness of injured virtue, was I not fearful that the sight of the Hebrew would overcome me."

"Yes, Sabrina," replied I, "I forgive you with all my

heart; this honest, this frank confession, is a certain sign of returning virtue. I embrace you, my love, and will hasten Joseph's enlargement, and reinstate him in the family. "Oh! never, never," answered she; "I shall not dare to behold him again: for although I feel nothing but the most laudable friendship for him now, I shall never dare to expose my weakness to danger so imminent any more. Do you, my lord, what you can to serve him in any other way, but do not let me see him. When I am dead, you may use your discretion; but save your poor, weak, and unstable spouse from temptation." She said, and I promising to comply with her request, left her to rest. Having unburthened her mind, she slept composedly all the night, and I have not seen such calm serenity on her countenance for a long time, as this morning when I visited her, before I came to wait on his majesty.

"But I see, Joseph, that your God, in whom you trusted, would not permit Potiphar to have the pleasure of presenting you to the king; but, whosoever he is that has that honour, shall be my friend for ever." Pharaoh replied, "Joseph has preferred himself to my regard; and your story, Potiphar, hath rivetted him in my esteem. It serves to illustrate and confirm what the native loveliness of his features indicate; and let me say, it does not a little embellish the character of my noble captain, to be so ready to repair an injury done through misinformation. Go home, my good lord, and let poor penitent Sabrina know, that Joseph is second in dignity and power in the kingdom of Egypt. The particulars of which you shall be informed of, Potiphar, at another time.

The same virtue that enabled Joseph to bear with fortitude the adversity to which his innocence had exposed him, enabled him now to hear his praise echoed from one to another, without pride or vanity. His purple robe, and almost imperial dignity, altered not the native humility and modesty of his mind; whereby he retained his dignity unenvied by those of inferior rank.

Pharaoh issued a royal proclamation, in which he nominated Joseph as high steward of Egypt, and required all his subjects, of what rank soever, to be aiding and assisting to him, in whatsoever work he should undertake, or in whatsoever else he might require. Joseph, on his part, be-

haved with so much equity, discretion, and benevolence, that the people in general rejoiced to see the reins of government put into a hand so suitable.

Advanced to power, the first thing he did was to establish the strictest economy at court, to abridge the king's expenses, as much as consisted with the dignity of so great a monarch, that the exchequer might furnish him money sufficient to buy up all the overplus of annual grain, and provide proper repositories for receiving it, when purchased. A square mile, on a pleasant meadow adjoining to Memphis, was selected for the seat of his granaries. The spring approached, and every thing in nature appeared to bear a fertile appearance; for the earth brought forth not in its usual course, but in great abundance. At the close of the year Joseph issued a proclamation, wherein he signified by royal authority, that at the king's granaries a certain price would be given for all the corn that should be delivered to the servants in waiting. The proclamation brought prodigious quantities of corn from all quarters, as soon as the overflowing of the Nile enabled them to bring it by water carriage: and this was continued annually for the space of seven years, by which time he had filled every place that he could procure with grain.

One day king Pharaoh took him into his closet, and thus addressed him: "Joseph, I and Egypt in general have reason to consider you as a preserver and redeemer, raised up unto us against the day of calamity. As your God hath been pleased to send you amongst us, it behoves us to do what we can to make your accommodation agreeable. I have proposed a match for you, Joseph. Nay, do not be surprised: it is with one of the first ladies of the Egyptian empire for birth, beauty, and virtue. I intend to bespeak her for you this very day. Had I a daughter of my own, that I deemed worthy of you, she should be your bride; but as I cannot thus gratify myself, I have sought out one to whom, I think, even the greatest of monarchs can have no objection."—"I beg," said Joseph, "that your majesty will leisurely think of it, before you propose a matter of such importance. How would a princess of Egypt be debased in being given to a mean and once unhappy foreigner, whose birth is comparatively obscure!"—"Say no more of it," replied the king, "for the matter is already determined.

It will be an honour to the greatest princess to be advanced to your bed."

This advantageous offer met not with that agreeable reception with Joseph as one would have expected. The fair unknown whom he had seen whilst a prisoner, had captivated his heart; for her he languished in secret, and could admit of no thoughts of another to have place in his mind. He knew not well how to conduct himself in a matter so delicate, but at all events he resolved to do no injustice to his first love, although unknown, by admitting a second to his embrace. Prince Potipherah being then at court, king Pharaoh proposed to him a match, between Joseph, lord high-chancellor of the kingdom, and the lovely Asenath, his virtuous daughter. The proposal was heartily embraced by the reverend prince, and at his master's command he went home to consult his daughter's inclinations. But how great was his surprise to find Asenath utterly averse to the honourable compact. "I entreat my father," she cried, with tears like pearls dropping down her cheeks: "I entreat that you will not oblige me to marry a man for whom I have not the slighest degree of desire, and who, since this proposal, is become the object of my real aversion."—"What objection can you have, Asenath," replied he, "to the lord high-chancellor, the favourite of both king and people? Inconsiderate woman, it is the greatest honour the king can confer upon you; and I insist on your embracing it, otherwise give me a plain account of your reasons for refusing it."—"Ah, sir!" said she, "the lord high-chancellor is not the man who can make me happy, and I would not marry till I can have the prospect of being happy in my husband."

Young Asenath was one of the party, who to grace the nuptials of Potiphar and Sabrina, went to hunt the monster of the desart, and had seen the young Hebrew's distinguished gallantry, in rescuing his mistress from the ferocity of the desperate lion. Her young and tender heart could not but feel the impression of the many graces of his amiable person; but his generous valour most sensibly touched her. In short, she conceived a most ardent and virtuous passion for him, and resolved, that if ever she should enter into the marriage relation, Joseph, the gallant Hebrew, should be the man of her choice. But seeing nothing of

him for a long time, she conceived a dislike to all other men; and, notwithstanding the fame of the lord high-chancellor resounded through every Egyptian mansion, she never had the curiosity so much as to look upon him.

It was insisted on, however, by Pharaoh and Potipherah, that she should have an interview with Joseph; notwithstanding, they had both of them too much goodness, absolutely to force the inclinations of either. But when they met, what a delightful surprise was it to Joseph to realize in Asenath the features, the air, and the very person of the lovely virgin, whom he had seen whilst a prisoner; and for whom, although unknown, he had renounced the whole female race. Nor was Asenath's surprise inferior in viewing in the person of the lord high-chancellor, every feature and gesture of her almost adored Hebrew. Never did two come together with more consummate aversion to each other, and never were two more agreeably disappointed. "And is it you, my lovely fair, for whom I so long have sighed, that unknown to me his majesty designed for my sp use?" said Joseph. "O my love, you cannot conceive what antipathy I entertained against you; but, blessed be the God of heaven, who brings the object of my warmest wishes to my bosom."—"And can it be possible that you, my lord, are the very deliverer of the fair Sabrina?" said Asenath: "ever since that jovial day, the noble, the gallant Hebrew, hath been the sole lord of all my affection. What a blessed Providence is this, that crowns my wishes by contradicting my inclination; for I hated you, Joseph; I hated the lord high-chancellor of Egypt, for the sake of my amiable Hebrew. Let us adore the wisdom and goodness of that God, who has in such a desirable manner disappointed our fears." The nuptials were solemnized the ensuing day, in the presence of the monarch. Great joy abounded amongst the people upon the occasion, and every body wished prosperity to the new-married couple.

Whilst Joseph continued prosperously to govern Egypt, it pleased God to visit eloquent Judah with a remembrance of his former treachery. Er, his first-born, mature in years, married a damsel whose name was Tamar, young, beautiful, and virtuous, in many respects surpassing her fellows. Er was atheistical and profligate, disregarded the com-

mands of Abraham's God, and sought only to gratify a sensual appetite, and wallow in the pleasures of the flesh. Judah and Shunah, his parents, endeavoured to correct the irregularities of his life by wholesome precepts and examples; but all their instructions he foolishly rejected, and sought for death in the error of his way. His disposition was the very reverse of Joseph's amiable qualities; virtue was the delight of the one, but vice alone was the pursuit of the other. It happened on a day, that Er was sent to a distant part of the country upon some rural business, when going past a fatal thicket, a panther sprung from the midst of it, and instantly tore him to pieces. Not returning at the time expected, messengers were dispatched to seek for him, and found him miserably torn by that monster of the wood. Then it was that Judah began to realize in his own experience the heart-wringing agonies of his father, upon Joseph's bloody coat being presented to him. Then the pathetic address of his suppliant brother, begging for life, returned to his mind, with all its affecting circumstances. And to the loss of his son he had the painful reflection of its being a just judgment of the Omnipotent upon him, for having joined his brethren to bring affliction upon chosen Jacob.

That the name of the elder born might not become extinct in Judah's family, Tamar was given to Onan, that seed might be raised up to his deceased brother. But Onan's heart being attracted by other charms, and knowing that should the marriage bed become fruitful, the children would not bear his name, he took care to prevent the fruits of their intercourse, though he did not altogether deny the pleasures of the conjugal state. What he did was offensive to the eye of infinite holiness, and the Most High, to avenge himself of his impiety, struck him dead with a blast of lightning darted from the aerial stores of wrath.

O Judah! how sensibly was thy heart affected by this second stroke of the divine hand! How didst thou read thy sin in thy punishment? Both thy sons snatched away by death in the prime of their days. Tamar, thy daughter-in-law, had the bitterness of burying two husbands, ere she reached the meridian of life. Shunah alone, young and

tender, supports the hopes of thy family. How did thy heart pant with jealous fear, lest vengeance should write thee down childless, and summon young Shunah to follow his elder brethren. Nothing but the fear of Simeon and Levi kept Judah back from making a full confession of his guilt before the venerable patriarch. But the fear of them restrained him still from duty, especially as he could never hear in what manner the Ishmaelites had disposed of Joseph.

BOOK VI.

Joseph purchaseth all the spare corn in Egypt for seven years—The famine begins to be felt—Jacob sendeth his sons down to Egypt to buy corn—Simeon's dream by the way—They are brought before Joseph—He knows them, but they know not him—He questions them strictly, and chargeth them with being spies—They study to clear themselves of the charge—He proposeth to send one of them to bring Benjamin down—That is objected to, on account of Israel and his family—They are imprisoned three days—The brethren reason concerning their cruelty to Joseph, and consider all this as the hand of God upon them—Simeon bound and cast into prison—The rest set out on their journey—They are surprised at finding their money returned in their sacks—They arrive in Canaan, and relate to their father all that befel them in Egypt—Long discourse between Jacob and them upon their present circumstances—They persuade Jacob to send Benjamin along with them—Jacob favoured with a divine vision, and is comforted.

PHARAOH had such proofs daily of Joseph's wisdom and fidelity, that he fixed no limits to his power: whatever was done throughout the land of Egypt he was the doer of it, and whatever he did prospered in his hand. His equipage was next in grandeur to that of his majesty himself, and only in the throne was Pharaoh greater than he. He went through the whole kingdom, provided granaries, appointed deputies in every province for purchasing all sorts of grain, the advantage of which was afterwards found, not only by the Egyptians, but other kingdoms adjacent.

As his duty and pleasure ran in the same channel, he collected corn sufficient, during the seven years of plenty, to supply the Egyptian empire for twice seven years of famine, had it been the pleasure of God to continue it so long; and this he was prompted to by his native benevolence, that thereby he might assist other distressed states. Never was a person more venerated than Joseph was by the Egyptians, when they saw every thing come to pass according to his prediction. All held him to be a peculiar favourite of the gods, and many of the vulgar could not help believing him to be some celestial deity, come down in human form to be the preserver of their beloved nation. For the Egyptians were under no doubt at all, that they were the people most dear to heaven. What different treatment did Elijah meet with from the seed of Israel, when he foretold the famine that fell out in his days? He was accounted the troubler of Israel, and was glad to fly for his life.

Joseph had continued to purchase corn for the space of

seven years; but such was now the will of Providence, that the rains fell not at their season upon the mountains of Abyssinia, in their usual quantity, to feed the streams of the Nile: so that the waters measured not above seven cubits upon the Nilescope; a quantity scarce sufficient to water the very lowest parts of the country. Of course there was very little grain produced in any part of the land, and that which grew was like Pharoah's thin ears, not worth the reaping. Now the famine began sensibly to be felt in the land of Canaan; and the Egyptians applied in their turn to their provident governor, to purchase food for their families.

The aged patriarch seeing the approach of pale hunger towards his family, made diligent inquiry where food might be procured for money; and being informed that in Egypt only there was corn, he assembled his descendants, and thus addressed them: "You see, my sons, that the all-wise Governor, provoked by the sins of men, has denied the first and latter rains in their season. Those lofty seas, which ride upon the air, are not suffered to descend and visit the thirsty world. You see there is neither earing nor harvest in the land, our family provision is almost exhausted, and ghastly famine makes hasty strides towards the dwelling of Israel. But why stand we gazing fearfully at one another? Let us use the means of support whilst in our power. We can but die, when the means of life have forsaken us. I am informed that fertile Egypt abounds with provision, whilst the rest of the world is starving for want; and that so hospitable is the governor of that land, that he sends none away empty who applies unto him for relief. Arise therefore, my sons, go down thither, and bring us provision for money; for money will be useless to us, when the staff of bread is cut off from our mouths. Thus shall ye avoid seeing your wives and children perish for want of sustenance.—Go all of you except Benjamin. I desire that he may be left to superintend our domestic affairs in your absence." Benjamin being all that the patriarch now possessed of his dear departed Rachel, he could not bear the thoughts of his being exposed to the dangers of such a journey.

The sons of Israel readily agreed to his proposal, and departed the ensuing morning towards Egypt. Two days

before they arrived at the capital, in the dead of the night, as they slept in the inn, Simeon dreamed that he was at Dothan along with his brethren consulting the death of Joseph; which being determined, he thought that just as they were going to cast him into the pit, an invisible hand was stretched down from heaven, snatched Joseph from the threatening danger, and carried him out of their sight. And as it lifted Joseph from the earth, with a jostle tumbled Simeon himself into the pit designed for his brother. Alarmed with his danger, he awoke in a fright ere he reached the bottom. Hard as his flinty heart was, the impression of this dream made him realize the anxiety of Joseph's mind on that day of his calamity. Nor could he, notwithstanding his resolution and courage, prevent his heart being dejected under the apprehension that his dream was ominous of some event fatal to his peace. Therefore the rest of the journey was dull and unpleasant to him.

Joseph by the spirit of prophecy knew that the famine was extensive, and reached even to the land of his fathers; and therefore conjectured that, amongst the many who came for provision, his brethren also might arrive; therefore described them to his steward, and directed him, that if such men should arrive, that they should not be served before they were brought before him. Accordingly when they came and applied at the granaries for corn, they were directed to wait on the governor's steward, who told them that he could not possibly give them an answer till his master, the lord high-chancellor, came home: but that being only gone out with his majesty for an airing, he would have them abide near the palace till noon, about which time he expected his return. They did so, and beheld such dazzling splendour in the king's and Joseph's equipage as they had never seen at any time before.

Brought before Joseph, he immediately recollected the features of every countenance, but they had not the least suspicion of him; and, notwithstanding his eminent meekness and humanity, he could not help the recollection of their baseness. The sight of them brought all his sufferings afresh to his mind. They bow before him with the most humble reverence, with their faces towards the earth, and wait for him to ask their business. This brought his dreams also to his mind, and, with a borrowed sternness, he

demanded their business with him, and directed his eye chiefly to Simeon.

Judah replied, for he was speaker at this time for the rest, "May it please your excellency, we are from the land of Canaan. Being pressed with the famine in our native country, hearing there was plenty of corn in Egypt, and also the fame of the governor's hospitality, we were induced to come down to purchase a little food for ourselves, our wives, and children, that they perish not in the general scarcity."

"Tell me not," said he, with a menacing countenance, "of such men as you being concerned in traffic. There is something in each of you that bespeaks you sprung from no common race; for by your deportment you might be the sons of a king. I suspect you to be men of birth, servants of some martial, enterprising state, come under this disguise to spy out the nakedness of the land."

"No, my lord," returned the parent of the Jews; "we are no spies, but true men; by the nakedness of our own country forced to seek for provision in a land more blessed with the bounties of Providence. We are strangers to court intrigue, and have no concern in martial achievements. Whatever may be the appearances of our persons, your excellency may assure yourself, that all our concern has been about cattle from our infancy; for your servants are not courtiers, but simple shepherds, and our only business in Egypt is to procure food for our families; for which we are very willing to pay whatever my lord may demand."

"No, no," returned Joseph, "such men as you have not the appearance of shepherds. Nor does your eloquence, my friend, discover you to be an attendant on the bleating herd. You would not be proper agents for carrying on a treacherous design against our state, if you had not sagacity enough to cover it over with dissimulation and guile. I tell you, you are spies, come with a bad design against the state."

"Far be it, my lord," said Judah, "from your servants, to be guilty of the dissimulation that your excellency speaks of. I assure you that we are all shepherds, as our fathers for some generations backward have been. We are the descendants of Abraham, whose name perhaps your excellency has heard of. We ten are brethren, sons of one man

in the land of Canaan. One remains this day with our father, and the other, alas! is not now numbered among his brethren."

"Well," replied Joseph, "ye declare your innocence in point of treachery. But I shall not take your bare word for it, but will prove you; and if ye bear the trial, and approve yourselves to be true men, and no spies, you shall find in me a friend, and you shall have liberty to go and come at your pleasure, and traffic in all the coasts of Egypt; but if it is found that ye are traitors and spies, ye shall surely be put to death. By this shall ye prove yourselves to be honest men. Let one of you be dispatched to your father's house, and fetch that younger brother of whom ye speak, and then will it appear that your words are right. If you refuse this, it is a sign that your purpose is bad; and, as sure as Pharaoh lives, ye are spies upon our state."

"No, my lord, we are not spies, indeed," answered Judah with a submissive voice, "notwithstanding we have one reason wherefore we cannot with pleasure submit to your excellency's command. And that is not fear of being detected as spies, but the famine of our houses. For we left but barely sufficient to supply the wants of our wives and children, during the time necessary for us to come hither for food, and return again unto them. If we should do as my lord hath said, then must all our father's house perish for want in our absence, and we should be guilty of their blood. Wherefore, if nothing but that will satisfy your excellency of our fidelity, it is better for us to submit to death in a strange land, than to return, and be witnesses of the evil to come upon our dearest kindred; for we cannot survive the destruction of our father's house."

Joseph commanded his guards in waiting to take the ten brethren into custody, and carry them to prison, where he kept them three days and three nights; but withal he gave secret orders to his steward to look well to them, to their servants and cattle, that they should lack nothing. On the third morning, as soon as the sun enlightened the earth, he ordered them all before him, and thus he addressed them: "I have considered all that ye have said when ye were last before me; and as there is a possibility of your testimony being true, I would not expose your old father, of whom ye spake, nor your wives and little ones, to the

severity of famine; for I fear God, and am no stranger to the feelings of humanity. One condition I propose to you, which must and shall be complied with; and that is, one of you shall be left bound in the house of your prison, as a hostage to ensure your return; and all the rest of you shall go to your families with what provision you can carry; and, when ye come again, be sure you bring your younger brother along with you; which if you do, your hostage shall be delivered up to you, and ye shall all go in peace again to your father. But if you return not, he whom I shall secure as a hostage, shall pay for your unfaithfulness with his life."

"O," said Judah, "how doth one sin bring a lasting train of evils after it? Er and Onan are fallen victims to that justice which avengeth Joseph's afflictions; another is now demanded, and who knows what the issue will be? The guilt of our brother's blood pursues us, and embitters every providence. Our God leaves us to intreat in vain; because, when we saw the anguish of his afflicted soul, we would shew him no mercy, although he besought us with tears. Lord, thy conduct is just—we alone are guilty."

"Did not I," said Reuben, "do what I could to dissuade you from a deed so vile and barbarous? I used every argument I was master of, to prevail with you to save the child's life, but all in vain. And, with a view to be able to restore him to his father's embrace, I proposed his being let down into the pit, and had performed my purpose the ensuing night, had I not been prevented by your untimely sale of him to strangers, who have carried him I know not whither. But an all-seeing and ever-watchful Providence, I doubt not, shelters him from injury in some country more hospitable, and affords him that peace and pleasure which he was denied in the house of his brethren, whilst we, his persecutors, are justly pursued by the avenging hand of Joseph's God."

"I freely confess," said Simeon, "that I never felt a proper remorse for that sin against my brother, till five nights ago, when I realized the anguish of his soul in what I myself felt in my dream. And from what I then felt, I have reason to fear, that something of a very afflicting nature is before me; for I find myself exactly in Joseph's circumstances when he was last in the pit: since then, my

mind has never been free from either the distressing idea of the boy's anxiety, or the overwhelming grief of our poor father, when Levi and I presented the bloody coat to him at Mamre. But let what will come, I find I deserve it. I should wish to be as submissive in my afflictions, as I was resolute in perpetrating the guilty deed."

Little did the sons of Jacob imagine, that the lord high-chancellor understood their discourse; for the better to conceal his relation to them, he had spoke all along by an interpreter, whom he caused to withdraw as soon as his brethren began to confer among themselves. With all the distance that Joseph affected, with all the resolution he could summons up, he found he could not suppress the rising tide of fraternal sympathy, ready to burst from his eyes upon hearing his brethren's penitent conference; therefore he turned him into a private apartment, and gave free vent to the emotions of his manly heart. And as soon as he had composed himself, he returned to them into the hall, and communed with them about the affairs of their native country, till their sacks were filled, and their camels and asses loaded with corn. But never was there such a struggle between sound policy and brotherly tenderness, as Joseph felt in his disturbed mind. Brotherly love urged him to fly to the embraces of his brethren, but sound policy advised to stay his caresses, till he had proved their regard to Benjamin his brother. Sound policy will prevail over passion, where wisdom presides.

It was just as Simeon's foreboding heart had presaged; for Joseph selected him from amongst his brethren, to detain him as hostage for the return of the rest: although it went now against the tenderness of his inclination to give pain even to Simeon, since he had some proof of his penitence. But he found himself under the necessity of either detaining one, or discovering himself to them; the latter of which he chose not to do for the present. Simeon therefore was bound in the presence of his brethren, and conveyed to prison; whilst the rest were dismissed from the presence of Joseph, and began their journey towards Canaan; not without much reflection upon the calamity to which they were reduced, and their cruelty to Joseph, as the procuring cause of all.

Arrived at the inn, how great was their surprise, when

Issachar, opening his sack to give his ass provender, found all the money he had given for his corn returned in the mouth of it; astonished at the event, he tells his brethren. Equally astonished, they fly every man to his sack to examine, and lo! in the mouth of every man's sack is found his money in full tale. In silent amazement they look at one another. Every one knows himself to have been clear; but no one man could be certain about his fellows. All alleged that the hand of their God was upon them for evil: but no one could so much as conjecture how their money should come to be returned. Sleep departed from the eyes of the patriarchs that night; for they expected every moment to hear the voice of the pursuers, coming to carry them back to the governor. In short, at last they considered the matter as a fraud put upon them, to find a pretext to enslave them. And well knowing that their detention in Egypt would prove the destruction of the house of Jacob, they resolved not to submit tamely to their betrayers, but to perish on the spot rather than be slaves to such perfidy, and to sell their lives as dear as possible. Now they lament the absence of Simeon, the strength of whose brawny arm they had heretofore amply proved: but all in vain their fears, and vain their desperate purposes. For Joseph had secretly commanded his chief factor to return all their money into their several sacks, in the same order in which it was found; so that when morning came, none appeared in pursuit of them. They laded their cattle, and proceeded on their journey, every now and then looking behind them to see if any danger appeared; and thus they proceeded from day to day, till they arrived at their own habitations.

The good old patriarch looking out, saw them at a distance moving on heavily, because of their loads of provision. And how did his aged heart beat thick with joy, to see them safely returned with food for their families! But how soon did his joy abate, when he discovered that Simeon was missing! They found themselves under a necessity of declaring all that had passed between the governor of Egypt and them, in their absence, and that Benjamin was demanded. Upon hearing of which the good man's heart failed him, and he could not forbear thus chiding them for their conduct: "Could not you, men of

your years, never remarkable for ignorance, have gone and bought provision for us, without revealing the circumstances of your family? What need was there for you to have mentioned that you had another brother at all? That could be nothing at all to a foreigner, nor would it have been at all inquired into, if you had not incautiously mentioned it. I cannot agree that Benjamin should go. On your account I am bereaved of my Joseph. Have you no more mercy on my feeble age, than to take Benjamin away also? All the things are against me."

Reuben, the elder-born, approached, and respectfully answered his father. "Were we insensible of the grief and affliction of a parent so venerable, we should debase ourselves below brutality itself. Let not Israel charge us with want of tender regard, if we have, through the necessity of circumstances, been induced to declare what he could wish to have been concealed. For my own part, I am of opinion, that the governor's countenance must greatly belie his heart, if any evil is to be apprehended at his hand: there is something so amiable and attractive in him, that I think I could, without hesitation, entrust my life in his hand: and, as a proof of my sincerity, I offer, that if my father will permit Benjamin to go along with his brethren as we have engaged, to leave my two sons, Honoch and Phallu, as pledges for his return; and if any harm befal him, let them be slain."

"Ah, Reuben!" replied the aged man, "thou talkest in a simple style. Should Benjamin be lost, the death of my grandsons would but make the wound deeper and more painful. Joseph is already dead, Benjamin is all that is now left of Rachel, for whom I served your grandfather fourteen years; and should he go with you, and evil befal him as it did Joseph, my hoary head would come down with an insupportable load of sorrow to the grave. My son Benjamin shall not go down with you."

Aged Jacob soon perceiving that their late purchase was three-fourths expended, apprized his sons of the necessity of returning into Egypt to renew their stock of provisions, to prevent the devastations which meagre famine would otherwise make in their dwellings. "Go," said he, "my sons, return into Egypt, and buy us a little food for the household."—"We go, sir," replied Judah, "if Benjamin

go with us; but if he is not with us we cannot go: for the lord-chancellor solemnly protested to us, that unless we brought our youngest brother with us, we should not see his face; and that if we did bring him, we should under the shadow of his protection, have full liberty to traffic in any part of Egypt. Think, therefore, my father, what we are to do, for want will speedily be here."

The holy man, with a heart wrung with sorrow, replied, "Wherefore, Judah, dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the lord of the land that you had another brother; for I understand that you were speaker for your brethren?"

"Alas, sir! the man was very strict in examining of us concerning our state, our kindred, the number of our father's children; and we told him the truth in every thing. Could we certainly know that he would demand our brother of us, and had we known that he would say, bring your brother down to me, we durst not have dissembled and uttered falsehood, for then we should have offended our God; and you yourself would have grieved for our transgression. Allow me to say, that my worthy father errs in his over-carefulness for Benjamin. We are all your sons as well as he; therefore equally entitled to your tender regard. But Simeon lies in chains in a foreign land, pale famine stares you and all of us, our wives and little ones, in the face. Nothing can save the life of Simeon, but our return into Egypt with our brother Benjamin; and nothing can save our tender families at home, but speedy supplies from that country. Send him with me, my father; I will be surety for him, of my hand do ye require him. If you will send him, we will arise and go directly; but if not, we cannot go. We may as well stay at home and die by famine with our wives and little ones, as be put to the sword in a strange land. Determine, therefore, what we are to do, my father: for, unless we had thus lingered, we might have been all safely returned the second time. And let Israel consider that certain death awaits us all, if Benjamin is not permitted to go with us, and there is but a bare peradventure of danger to him if he goes. Remember, my father, the God of Bethel, in whom thou hast trusted, he is in Egypt as well as in Canaan. He is able to protect thy Benjamin in what land soever."

He ended here, and the pensive patriarch replied,

"Well, Judah, your reasoning is home and conclusive. We will call the boy, and inquire at his own mouth: if he be willing, I shall not farther oppose his going; but if he is not willing, I will by no means constrain him. Are you willing, Benjamin, to accompany your brethren through the dangers of another journey to Egypt? They protest they will not go without you, and I am very unwilling to expose your young and tender years to the hardships and dangers of such a journey. Be free, my son, and speak your mind." Said Benjamin, "I should ill deserve to call Jacob my father, if I should so much as desire to shun any dangers to which my brethren are exposed. Far be it from me to delight in loitering at home, whilst they, by hardship and toil, are caring for me and my little ones. I am not only perfectly willing to go with them, my father, but even desirous of it; and would have proposed it ere now, had it not been for fear of adding to your burden, my father: I want to see this lord-governor of Egypt. I know not how it is, but ever since my brother Reuben gave you an account of him, I have found my mind unaccountably attached to him. And last night I dreamt that I stood in his presence along with my brethren, and I thought I saw something so unspeakably agreeable in him, that I could not but love him. But when he came to embrace me (for I thought he embraced me), I felt such a glow of friendship warm my bosom, that I never experienced the like in my life. For my part, I am of Reuben's mind, I fear no harm from the lord-governor."—"Well, my son," said the hoary patriarch with a deep groan, "I must submit. God grant that ye be not mistaken in the man.

"But, my sons, take double money along with you, besides that which was returned in your sacks, and repay it: perhaps it might be done undesignedly by some of the overseers of the stores. And go not empty handed to the man, seeing a gift in the bosom pacifieth anger; but take with you a handsome present of the best produce of our land; such as balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds. And O, God Almighty, go thou with my sons, and give them favour in the sight of the governor."

The sons of Israel departed; the Lord appeared unto Jacob in a vision of the night, and said unto him, "Jacob,

what seest thou?" Jacob replied, "I see an almond tree, exceeding fair, smooth, and strong in the trunk, branched out into twelve capital boughs, each of which are subdivided into innumerable branches, and all laden with fruit of the most luxuriant growth." The vision answered, "Thou hast well seen, Jacob. Thou art the beautiful almond tree; from thee twelve branches are sprung, which shall bring forth seed innumerable as the sand of the sea. Ask not how it can be done, seeing one branch is lopped off from the native stem. Be satisfied in this, that what infinite wisdom hath proposed, almighty power can accomplish; leave thy Benjamin to the care of his God, for thou shalt embrace him in safety." So spake the vision; and, departing, left a glow of seraphic fervour in the patriarch's heart, something like that which he felt at Peniel, when like a prince he prevailed with God.

BOOK VII.

The sons of Israel arrive at Memphis with Benjamin—Judah apologizeth for the returned money—Offers the present Jacob had sent—They are invited to dine with the governor—Their jealousy of some design against them—Simeon's opinion is asked—Their meeting with Joseph—His struggle with natural affection—They dine with him—His scheme to try their affection to Benjamin—They are pursued by the steward—Searched, and Benjamin is convicted of stealing Joseph's cup—They all return to the palace—Judah confesseth their former guilt—Levi's lamentation for Benjamin—Judah's defence of Benjamin—Benjamin studieth to reconcile his brethren to his fate—Simeon and Levi resolve to rescue him or die with him—Joseph makes himself known to his brethren—He comforts and encourages them—Invites them and all his father's house to come and live in Egypt—They regale themselves with Joseph, and depart from Egypt.

ARRIVED in Egypt, they were conducted into the governor's presence, who inwardly rejoiced to see the sons of his father safely returned in company with Benjamin his brother. "Well," said he, "you have fulfilled the condition on your part, it behoves me to be equally faithful on mine; I shall give orders for your brother's immediate release from prison." When he saw them all together, he ordered his steward to kill a yearling, and make plentiful provision; "for," said he, "these men shall be my guests to-day." Having given necessary orders for his household affairs, and having business to dispatch abroad, he left his brethren alone until noon. Now Judah approached the steward, and thus apologized for the money that was returned in their sacks. "O, my lord, we are under great difficulties at present, and have need of your friendship, as your influence with my lord the chancellor is great. When we came down at first, notwithstanding your lord was jealous of us, we had indeed no other business in Egypt but to buy food for our families. The corn we purchased, and, as we thought, paid for; but, to our great surprise and grief, when we opened our sacks, every man found his money in full weight in the mouth of his sack. How it came there we cannot conceive. But willing to deal uprightly with all men, we have brought that money which was returned again in our hands, besides the money which we would now lay out for fresh provision. Will it please my lord to accept the returned money, and pardon what oversight soever might occasion it? We have also brought a small present of the fruits of our land, for my lord the chancellor, which we beg you would present to him in our name."

"Your present for my lord," said the steward, "I willingly accept for him; but as for your money, I cannot receive it, as you paid the full value when you received your corn. As to the money ye found in your sacks, make yourselves very easy about it. It is a gift of your God, from which no evil is likely to ensue. Set your hearts at rest, and compose yourselves; for I have orders from my lord to inform you, that he expects you all to dine with him at noon in his palace." As they did not much relish this invitation, they would gladly have excused themselves from the honour designed, and with more peaceful thoughts have dined on an humble allowance in their inn; but as no excuse could be admitted, they were obliged to submit to the governor's pleasure.

The steward withdrawn, and they left alone, they began thus to reason one with another. One said, "Simeon's release looks well upon the governor's side, but I like not this invitation. There is oftentimes the most malignant design carried on under the mask of friendship."—"Now we have convinced him that we are no spies," said another, "I fear he is about devising some other plausible pretence to detain us as slaves in the land." "I must confess," said a third, "that an invitation to such as we, to dine with the second person of the empire, looks very dubious." "For my part," said young Benjamin, "I am under no apprehension of any such thing. I see something in my lord-chancellor, that convinceth me that it is impossible for him to allow himself in unrighteousness. What is your opinion, Simeon? You have had more acquaintance with the Egyptian manners than we have had."

"Really, my brother," said Simeon, "I know not what to think of the present invitation, any more than the rest of you. To me it must seem somewhat mysterious, to be brought from a prison to dine in a palace. Yet I assure you, I have met with no ill usage here, farther than my confinement. I was bound you saw in your presence; but, as soon as you were departed, I was led away to an apartment agreeable in all respects, except that I was confined to it. I was daily supplied with plenty of excellent food, but from whence it came I was never informed. The governor himself did me the honour of frequent visits, and conversed familiarly with me concerning the Hebrew lineage, (for he

appears to be no stranger to Abraham, notwithstanding he is an Egyptian) concerning our father and Benjamin; and, especially, concerning the death of Joseph. And I have observed, that when we have been conversing about these things, sometimes the tears would steal involuntarily from his eyes. I cannot say I have any apprehension of evil now you have fulfilled your engagements."

As they were thus reasoning among themselves, Joseph came home, and ordered them into the hall of his palace. The steward, at their request, presented the balm, myrrh, &c. which he received with visible satisfaction, to the great pleasure of his brethren. Then he ordered them all to sit down, and inquired after their welfare.

"Have you been all well, my friends," said he, "since your departure hence? Did you find your good old father alive and well? Are your wives and children well?"

Judah replied, "We got well home, and found thy servant our father in as good health as his advanced age would permit, likewise our wives and children we found well. But we have cause to fear for our father at our return; for it cut him to the heart to part with his youngest son."

"And this is your youngest brother of whom ye spake!" said he. "God be gracious to thee, my son. I hope thy father will have no cause to be sorrowful for sending thee hither."

He said, but his swollen heart could bear no more. He knew not how to keep from his brother's embrace. Therefore he hasted from the hall, before his brethren could perceive his disorder, and sought a private apartment, where he might give vent to the overflowings of his heart. But that he would prove them, whether they retained the same malignant disposition towards Benjamin that they had done towards him, he would have rushed to their embrace, and bedewed them with fraternal tears. But, as before, his wisdom superseded his passion; and he concealed his affection for them till he could be satisfied of their temper towards Benjamin.

Having eased his almost bursting bosom, by the briny flood he shed, he washed off the tears from his face, went into dinner with the sons of his father, who all set at table with him according to seniority, from Reuben down to Benjamin. Thus seated, Joseph sent messes from before him

unto them all, beginning at Benjamin, and leaving off at Levi, of whose repentance he had had no particular proof. But little Benjamin's mess was a five-fold portion, designed to inform him, that he had found a friend in the governor of Egypt. So they eat and drank till they were merry in his presence.

But Joseph, in order to prove their regard for his brother Benjamin, contrived to have him arrested as an offender, to see what an effect it would have upon them. Accordingly, he commanded his steward, saying, "I have not yet done with these men; I must get you to assist me in a scheme which I have devised to put them to a more close trial than before. Go fill their sacks with corn, and put every man's money in the mouth of his sack, and take this silver cup of mine, and put it into that of the youngest along with his corn money. But do it yourself; let none be privy to it but you and I."

They had not been long departed, before the steward was commanded to take a troop of light horse and pursue them, charge them with the theft, and bring them back unto the governor. Great was their surprise when they looked behind them, and saw a company of armed men closely pursuing them. They stopped their cattle, and stood still to inquire the cause. "Is this," said the steward, "the manner in which ye foreigners requite the kindness of my lord? Could not you partake of his hospitality without stealing away his plate? You are possessed of my lord's cup, the silver cup out of which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth. This is basely done, to requite his goodness to you with such evil."

"I am amazed," said Judah "to hear such a charge from the mouth of my lord. God forbid that any of the sons of Israel should be guilty of such baseness. Consider, sir, how unlikely it is that we should be guilty of stealing your lord's cup. When our money was returned in our sacks unknown to us, we brought it back from the land of Canaan. Had we been dishonestly inclined, why kept we not it to ourselves? How then should we go to steal from thy master either silver or gold? But you are welcome to search and satisfy yourself; and if it be found with us, he with whom it is found shall die, and the rest of us will be content to become bondmen to your master."

"Be it so," replied the steward; "he with whom the cup is found shall be detained a bondman to my master, but all the rest may proceed on their journey." They hasted and unladed their cattle; and the steward began to search, beginning at the sacks of the eldest till he came to Benjamin's sack; out of which, to their utter confusion, he took his master's silver cup; in the presence of them all held it up, and said, "Are you now wrongfully charged?" In utter despair they rent their clothes, laded their cattle, and returned to the city; for they would not go forward without their brother Benjamin.

Joseph was still in the hall, waiting their return, and had collected all the sternness he was master of in to his countenance. "What is this," said he, "that ye have done? Did you suppose that I could not find out your treachery? Is it right in you thus to requite my kindness?"

They all fell prostrate before him, with their faces to the earth; and Judah with humble submission thus addressed him:—"Alas! my lord, it will be in vain for us to protest our innocence, seeing the cup was found in our possession: though the God of governors will not charge us with putting it there. It is not for this, but old iniquity, for which thy servants suffer. It is not thy hand, but that of our God that is upon us. We confess his judgments to be just. We submit to his sentence, and yield ourselves bondmen in a strange land. Take us, my lord, and dispose of us as you please. Farewell, aged and honourable Israel! may Abraham's God be thy divine support; for thou seest thy sons no more for ever. Joseph is not; Benjamin is convicted of felony, and all thy sons are determined not to survive his fate. He shall not bear the guilt of his brethren alone. Farewell, beloved wives and tender prattling infants! no more ye fly to the glowing embraces of your husbands and parents. Injured Joseph! never did the blood of Abel cry louder for vengeance than thine doth! Er and Onan are both already fallen victims to avenge thee; and now all the race of Jacob are required! Innocent Benjamin! why should he suffer with his guilty brethren?" So saying, his voice was stopped by his rising sorrow, and he poured forth a copious flood of repentant tears, and then proceeded: "Keep us not in suspense, my lord. Let us know our doom; for we are prepared to meet the worst."

"God forbid that I should do injustice to you," said Joseph, "either in putting you to death, or keeping you all for bondmen. Only he with whom the cup was found shall be liable to punishment. And as for the rest of you, go ye home to your father in peace; and come and traffic in the land, whenever ye have occasion. There is a law of certain and punctual equity, which ought to be observed by all in power; and that is, on the one hand, not to let the offender pass with impunity; nor, on the other, to punish the innocent, however nearly allied to the guilty. I fear God: his law is my rule; it warrants me to punish delinquency wherever it is found, but forbids me at all to oppress the innocent. You ten are therefore at liberty to go where you will; my business is alone with the offender."

"Alas! my brother Benjamin," said Levi, "is all your prepossession in favour of the governor come to this? How was thy simple and honest heart beguiled! O my brother, how false was thy dream that made, as thou thought, the governor's friendly embrace thrill with a warming glow throughout thy whole bosom! O my brother, my brother! I shall never return to Canaan without thee."

Judah came forward, and thus implored the chancellor's mercy:—"Alas! my lord, spare the young man, our brother, from bonds, imprisonment, and death. But for the guilt of his brethren, his birth might seem to have promised better prospects. Much might be urged in our brother's defence. He is young, inexperienced, and has seen but little of the world. His conduct has hitherto been unimpeached; and merciful governors do not usually punish with severity the first fault of any delinquent. It might be urged, that the lad was not present when the sacks were filled; and there is at least a possibility of the cup being conveyed into the sack without his knowledge. Nevertheless, as appearances are strong against him, we stand not to justify ourselves; but rely upon the clemency of my lord-governor. Although the guilt may be charged but upon one, the punishment must of necessity fall upon the whole; for our fate is involved in his. Allow me to say it, for I now speak for life or death, that mercy is the brightest perfection of Deity, and must therefore be the glory of princes and governors—anger and resentment being passions fitted only for slaves, and narrow, contracted, selfish spirits. We

have here delivered up ourselves to your lordship; and, I think, it would not be for the honour of Egypt for its governor to destroy a number of men, who are willing to become indebted for their lives to his mercy and favour. You have already relieved us when we otherwise must have perished for want; be pleased to exercise the same clemency in bestowing a free pardon upon these that are willing to be accounted guilty. What, if the God of our fathers, whose wisdom is unsearchable, and whose judgments are a great deep, should have suffered your servants to fall into these distressing circumstances, on purpose to furnish my lord with farther opportunity of exercising his virtue. It will, indeed, shew a noble disposition in my lord-governor, to delight in conferring life and mercy, rather than in taking strict vengeance for injuries sustained by himself.

"Let my lord assure himself, that it is not for our own life and safety that we are thus solicitous. No; life has lost its principal charms, since such a reproach is brought upon the house of Israel. But it is tenderness for a good old father, already bowed down with a series of adverse providences. And the loss of his children will bring down his honourable grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. I know well what I say, my lord. I have felt the wringings of parental anguish on the sudden loss of my own children. I have seen the insupportable sorrow of my father's spirit upon the loss of his Joseph. And should he be bereaved of Benjamin, in whom his very life is wrapt up, it is easy to see what will follow. Perhaps my lord has an aged father alive. Suppose him, my lord, in the place of our father, and let his hoary hairs be an advocate for an unhappy youth, whose life is in your hand. You have sons, my lord. From your parental tenderness to them, conceive what our father must feel upon the loss of his children. There is something sacred in the name of father: therefore the Most High has chosen it, as one of the endearing names whereby he reveals himself to his people, and whereby he chooseth to be addressed by them. God, your heavenly father, will certainly requite all the kindness which you shall shew to this young man, and unto us in him. I pray, my lord, by all that is tender and endearing in the bonds of nature; by all that is amiable in a member of society, and by the endearing obligations we are all under to the Father of mercies,

that you will spare the boy to be a comfort to his aged parents.

"I became bound to restore him to his father again, and shall not return without him. If he is to die, I offer myself in his stead; or if the sentence is slavery, it is the same. Death and slavery are alike to me. In saying this I speak but the sentiments of all my brethren; for they are all determined to stand or fall with Benjamin."

So saying, he cast himself at the governor's feet, and all the rest after him, in joint mediation for their unhappy brother: all seemingly to no purpose.

Benjamin, with an amiable serenity, and with a glow of brotherly affection, said, "My brethren, if the governor's heart is a stranger to pity, I fear not what he can inflict. It is but to die, and he himself cannot escape it. But live ye, my brethren: for Israel's sake accept the life that is offered you. It will be some satisfaction for our good father to hear, that his Benjamin is innocent of the crime for which he suffers. Let me repeat my request, my brethren; for I fear not death."

With the greatest difficulty Joseph suppressed the gust of tender affection ready to burst forth, so far as to be able with some degree of austerity to command the guard to secure the prisoner.

Simeon and Levi sprung from their places, drew their well-tried swords, rushed between the guards and their brother, and with all the vehemence of passion cried out, "If Benjamen dies, he dies neither alone nor unrevenged. These swords have been bathed in the blood of hundreds; and hundreds yet shall perish ere Benjamin dies an unmerited death. The children of Ham shed not Hebrew blood at free cost. If we must die, let us sell our lives as dear as possible."

"Stay your hands upon both sides," cried Joseph; "it is enough. Let all depart the hall except the eleven brethren," said he; and all departed. Left alone with his brethren, Joseph said, "I have tried and proved your virtue, my brethren, and rejoice to see it. I am Joseph! your own brother Joseph!" he said, and burst into tears as he fell upon Benjamin's bosom, and wept aloud, that even the Egyptians heard him. His brethren stood in the utmost amazement, and confusion glowed upon every

countenance. The sight of their injured brother realized all the horrors of their guilt. They durst not approach him, however much they rejoiced at seeing him alive.

He went to them one by one, and embraced them with ardent affection; and, in particular, he assured Simeon and Levi that their generous valour, in defence of his brother Benjamin, had effectually obliterated the last remains of his resentment of their former conduct towards him.

When passion had subsided on both sides, and cooler reason had resumed her government, all being seated in the hall of the palace, Joseph thus harangued them: "My dear brethren, it is impossible for me to describe the pleasure you have this day given me, by your firm and zealous attachment to Benjamin, your brother and mine. It was not without some ground, as you know, that I had suspicion of your regard to the descendants of Rachel. To be satisfied in this, I devised the scheme by which your virtue has so eminently discovered itself. Reuben, you deserve my warmest acknowledgment for the service you intended me at Dothan; but it had been worse for us all to-day, if your well-meant scheme had succeeded. Whilst I was in the pit I had a vision of a heavenly messenger, that informed me of the mind and will of God concerning me, and perfectly reconciled me to my fate. Methinks the countenances of Simeon and Levi are not free from cloudy apprehensions. O my brethren, dismiss your fears. I should be worse than an infidel, if your generous attachment to Benjamin did not wholly rivet you in my esteem. Yes, my brethren, I will ever confide in the noble resolution of Simeon and Levi. I have seen so much of the hand of my God in my personal affairs, that I have really lost sight of second causes; or I love them with the greater tenderness, knowing that there must be poignant remorse follow after evil meanings. Your meaning was then evil I acknowledge, but the design of God was good; and I should be exceedingly culpable before God, if I did not heartily approve of the means by which he has exalted me.

"I assure you, my brethren, that all past injuries are with me as if they had never been; and I rejoice to see the spirit of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, diffuse itself throughout all his seed. Here, in this cup of cordial friendship, let us drink an eternal oblivion of past injuries. And now,

my brethren, you see what God hath done; but, perhaps, as yet you know not the cause of it. I am here advanced to power and dignity in Egypt; not for my own sake, but for yours, and that of my father's house, to preserve much people alive. Two years of the famine are already past. Last year the Nile did not arise to its usual height by eight cubits; and this present year, not by twelve cubits. Five years are yet to come, in which there shall be neither earing nor harvest. As this is the case, it may reconcile you to what cannot be recalled, or remedied; and you may see that God over-ruled your little prejudices for Israel's good. After you have regaled yourselves with me a day or two, I would have you return to Jacob, my father, and tell him of all things that God hath done for me in the land of Egypt. How that he hath made me as a father to Pharaoh, and lord over all the land. Tell him, that I invite the whole house of Israel down to Egypt, to sojourn till the famine is over and gone. And lo, I send light carriages by you to carry my father, your wives, and little ones, and bring them down to me."

By this time it was known in Joseph's palace, that his brethren were come; it got wind in the streets, and flew like lightning from one street to another, till it had spread itself all over the metropolis. The inhabitants in general were in a rapture of joy; and to testify their regard to the lord high-chancellor, there were bonfires made in every opening, bells ringing, waterworks playing, and every other demonstration of joy that those ancient times admitted of. And even Pharaoh himself rejoiced to hear of the brethren of his favourite being arrived in Memphis.

Now Joseph commanded Manasseh and Ephraim to be brought before him, and presented them to their eleven uncles; and the fair Asenath greatly rejoiced in having found such a number of heroic brethren. Pharaoh commanded Joseph to send suitable provisions and carriages for Jacob and his children, and from the monarch himself, to invite him to come to Egypt, and assure him of protection and provision all the time the famine should last. This the considerate monarch did, to prevent any envious mind from reflecting on Joseph, for any kindness shewn to the household of Israel.

Having regaled themselves two days with Joseph, and

seen every thing curious and valuable in the metropolis, he sent them away, after he had given them friendly advice.

After supper, the evening before they began their journey, Joseph thus addressed them: "My dear brethren, you are now going to visit the best and most honourable of fathers, to bring him the unexpected news of having found his son, who has been so long lost. You will be prudent enough, I hope, to take care how you divulge the matter to him; lest the news of my life should prove as fatal to him, as the former news of my death had likely to have done. Let it be done with caution, and by little and little. In all probability you will find yourselves under a necessity of disclosing the whole of the former plot against me, in order to account for my being yet alive. But, my brethren, beware of reflecting upon each other's conduct: remember that the hand of God was in it. I sympathize with you, my brother Judah, under the heavy loss of my youthful nephews. But I foresee that Judah shall yet be great in the house of his father, and they shall descend from Judah, who are destined to rule. Let all thoughts of past things be for ever banished from your minds, and cultivate amongst yourselves the strictest amity and friendship. Whilst you stand by one another, as you all nobly did the other day by my brother Benjamin, no power on earth shall overcome you; but if ye should disagree among yourselves, ye would become an easy prey to every enemy.

"Ye depart to-morrow. But let me not send you empty away. You will be pleased to accept of this, as a small token of my regard to the children of my father." So saying, he presented each of them with a goodly sum of money and changes of raiment, but Benjamin's present was three times as valuable as any of the rest: he likewise sent ten beasts of burden, laden with the best things of Egypt, as a present to his honourable father; and other ten, laden with healthful and delicate provision for them all by the way. Then he blessed them, took his leave of them, and retired to communicate the whole adventure to Asenath, his beloved consort.

BOOK VIII.

The sons of Jacob arrive at Canaan—He inquires after all that befel them in their absence—Judah relates the governor's kindness—Jacob expresseth his thankfulness on their account—Excuses his backwardness to send Benjamin with them—Simeon confesseth their former treachery to Joseph—Judah informs the patriarch of his being alive—Benjamin confirms his report—Jacob faints, but is recovered by the sight of the waggons—Jacob hesitates about accepting Joseph's invitation—He is encouraged by a vision—They set out for Egypt—He meets with Joseph at Heropolis—Their exceeding joy and endearing caresses—Joseph presents five of his brethren to the king—They are sent to Goshen—Jacob takes up his lodging in Joseph's palace for a time—Presented to the king—Relates Abraham's victory over the four kings—The famine ended, Joseph restores the Egyptians to their estates—Sabrina on her death-bed requests a visit from Joseph, that she might implore his forgiveness—He meets unexpectedly with Alvah in distress, requites his former kindness to himself.

THE venerable patriarch, impatient for his sons' return, and solicitous for Benjamin's welfare, stood upon an eminence near his rural dwelling, with his sanguine eye intently fixed upon the way of Egypt; when he beheld his sons afar off, and as fast as feeble age would admit, he hastened to embrace them. Have my sons, said he in his heart, found favour with the governor of Egypt, that they are safely and timely arrived. Blessed be the God of my fathers, who so graciously has returned you all, my sons, to my longing embrace. And blessed be the man, the lord of the land, who dealt friendly with tender Benjamin. Thus the good old man vented the gratitude of his heart, whilst his sons drew near and unladed their cattle. Very prudently had they left the carriages behind at a distance, under proper conductors, that their father's surprise might be the less, until they had gently insinuated the rapturous news into his aged ear. Every thing arrived—cattle, servants, and stores, disposed of properly till a fit opportunity, the sons presented themselves before their venerable parent, to join him in offering up an evening oblation to that God, who had led them forth in peace, and brought them home in safety; for, in the days of yore, the pious race delighted to acknowledge God for every benefit. The solemn service devoutly attended to, whilst gratitude and humble adorations ascended with the smoke of the incense, the patriarch assembled all his family, sons, daughters, and grand-children, and with an excess of parental fondness, embraced them all again, and inquired after what had befallen them since their departure for Egypt.

"Come Judah," said he, "you became surety for your brother Benjamin; tell me, my son, by what means you have been enabled to fulfil your engagement?"

"My father," replied Judah, "it is with pleasure I can inform you, that we had a safe and pleasant journey down to Egypt; and as soon as we arrived there, we were conducted to the presence of the governor, whom we found to be a sensible and humane person, capable of feeling the distresses of his fellow-creatures. As soon as he had, by proper inquiry, found that we had fulfilled our agreement with him, he forthwith ordered our brother Simeon to be released and delivered unto us. He asked, with a great deal of affection, after our welfare in our absence; in particular for our aged father, our wives and tender offspring: in short, he seemed to interest himself in our concerns, as much as if he had been our brother. You cannot think, my father, with what delight he gazed upon, and with what affection he embraced our brother Benjamin. He not only returned our money for our corn, but has been pleased to bestow a sum and suit of apparel upon each of us, and unto Benjamin he hath given three hundred pieces of silver, and five suits of rich apparel, besides a very rich and valuable present which he has sent for you, my father, and which shall be laid before you to-morrow morning."

"Blessed be the Lord God," said Jacob, "who gave you such favour in the sight of the man. And, O! may all his kindness to you, my sons, and to your father's house, be returned tenfold unto him by the mighty God of Jacob. How causeless were my fears for you, my Benjamin! How did my heart tremble to think, that peradventure evil might befal you! and I concluded, my son, that I could not survive the loss of you. But you know, my sons, that my loss of Joseph might reasonably make me more fearful than otherwise I might have been. I loved him for his mother's sake, I saw abundance of excellences in his opening genius, and I thought I could see a spirit of prophecy in the dreams he related to us. Yet, after all these things, Joseph was torn to pieces."

"No, my father," replied Simeon, "Joseph was not torn to pieces. It shall be my part now, to reveal a mystery of iniquity, which venerable Israel never could suspect his sons to have been guilty of. His dreams, my

father, fired the hearts of his brethren with jealousy; and, foreseeing that if he lived in Canaan, we should become subject to him, we conspired against him to slay him. This was indeed our first purpose; for I have now such a sense of the evil of our proceedings, that I will not attempt to extenuate them. Reuben alone opposed the horrid deed, and thereby exposed himself to danger. Our purpose, however, was over-ruled, and instead of putting him to death, we sold him to some Midianitish merchants. The coat dipt in blood was a contrivance of ours, to hide ourselves from a suspicion of guilt. Oh! sir, accuse not your sons; for it has cost us dear. Our guilt has produced the keenest remorse, and we cannot bear the frowns of an injured father."—" But Joseph is not, Simeon," said the patriarch; " I am bereaved of my Joseph; and what restitution can you make? Though not torn in pieces as I supposed, he may be enslaved in some foreign country, where I shall never embrace him."—" No, sir," replied Judah, " he is not enslaved; we have seen him, we have embraced him, and have conversed with him. He it is that is lord over all the Egyptian monarchy."—" Oh! what do ye tell me?" replied the patriarch, and sunk down in his chair. A little come to himself, he said, " Does Joseph live? Can it be possible? If he lives, O that these withered arms could grasp him."—" Yes, my father," returned Benjamin, " he lives. Joseph, my brother, lives! I embraced him. He wept upon my neck, and I on his; and he sends you an invitation by me, to come and sojourn with him in Egypt till the famine is gone; which he assures us, will be five times twelve months."

" O Benjamin, what do ye say? are you assured that you now speak the truth? I saw his many-coloured coat torn in pieces, and smeared with his blood. How then can he yet live?"—" Remember, my father," said Benjamin, " what Simeon has just now declared; that they killed a young goat, and dipped the coat in the blood thereof, rent it, and delivered it to you, my father. So that Joseph lives, and is lord-governor of all the kingdom of Egypt. He hath, besides, sent waggons and other light carriages, my father, to convey you and yours down into the land of Egypt; for he tells us, that there are yet five years more

of the famine to come, in which there shall be neither earing nor reaping."

"That he lives, I am thankful for," replied the patriarch; "as to his grandeur, it affects me not. But Joseph lives: that is enough. I will spend the small remains of life in taking a journey to embrace my son before I die. My Joseph, how have I wept over thy death, my son! But O, my God! let me but embrace him, and I soon shall forget all the sorrow sustained upon his account. Yes, Joseph, I come to see thee, my son. Israel comes to bow himself down upon the neck of him who was separated from his brethren. Make ready, my sons, for our speedy departure. The lamp of nature is already, with me, reeling in the socket. What I do must be quickly done, lest death prevent me.

"But O, my sons! for your sakes, and the sake of my grandchildren, I dread to embrace my Joseph's invitation." —"What objections, sir, can you have to it? There is plenty in all the land of Egypt. There is corn, wine, and oil, treasured up by Joseph's provident care," said Reuben. "It is that very plenty I dread, my son. And that I fear may be as injurious to your morals as the famine might have been to your families. What, if the abundance of corn and flesh reported to be there, should incline my seed to settle in that strange land, and do what they can to frustrate the Lord's design of putting you and your children in the land of Canaan. I fear for you, my children. Ye are young, and can relish the pleasures of sense. Was I to go alone and visit my son, the danger might be less; as I am old, and the pleasure of enjoyment is departed from me." Jacob, however, could not resist the importunity of his sons, especially Benjamin, who pleaded hard that he might go and spend his days near his brother Joseph. "Well, my children, I go," said he; "but I adjure you by the greatest of names, that ye entertain no thoughts of settling in Egypt, nor of mixing yourselves with the children of Ham."

So early next morning he arose, he and his sons, and his son's wives and children, and departed from the neighbourhood of Salem, having first offered a morning sacrifice upon the altar El-eloche-Israel, and that day reached the

well of the oath, where he pitched his tent, and rested that night in the grove which Abraham planted, and where he was accustomed to offer up his devotions, morning and evening, to the Lord his God. Here also the journeying patriarch with his family, offered sacrifices unto and invoked the unutterable name of Jacob's God. And lo! in the second watch of the night, the tent of Israel was irradiate with celestial brightness, far surpassing the sun in his strength, and a voice not foreign to Jacob's ear was heard to cry aloud, "Jacob, Jacob." The raptured parent of the chosen race, replied—"Here am I. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

The voice replied, "Fear not, Jacob; for I am thy God, the God of thy fathers Abraham and Isaac. I have seen all thy solicitude for thy children's welfare, and approve thy pious regard for the promise of thy God. But know, O, Jacob, that it was thy God who separated Joseph from thine embrace, to make him a nursing father to the house of Israel. I have given him glory, wealth, and power, in the land of Egypt for thy sake, Jacob; that by his means, I may save the people of my covenant. Fear not, therefore, to carry thy seed down unto that land of plenty. Even there shalt thou meet with thy God, O Israel; for I will go down with thee, and for thy sake will visit Egypt. There will I greatly multiply thy seed, and fulfil all that I spake unto Abraham concerning them. When I have made of thee a great nation, I will bring thy seed forth with wonders and signs in the heavens above, and in the earth below: yea, with a mighty and stretched out arm will I save thy seed, Jacob. As for thee, thou shalt die in a good old age, in a strange land, and thy exiled son shall bedew thy bed with tears of filial sorrow, and close thine eyes in death. Accept, therefore, of Joseph's invitation, and go into Egypt, confident of the presence and protection of the God of thy fathers." Thus said, the vision departed. In the morning Jacob arose, took his sons and daughters and their little ones, their cattle, and all the goods which they had procured in the land of Canaan, and journeyed towards Egypt. Greatly invigorated by the late vision, the patriarch proceeded cheerfully on his journey, till got about half-way between Shechem and Memphis, when he dispatched Judah and Naphtali to court, to inform Joseph

of his father's approach: and he, on his part, immediately set out with a numerous train of obedient servants to meet him, and the better to expedite the journey of the Hebrew caravan. They met at the city of Heropolis, where Joseph was well-known, and regarded as the saviour of Egypt. Both father and son had endeavoured, upon their journey, to fortify their hearts, for the expected interview. Yet do what they would, they could not restrain nature from breaking through all the injunctions of reason. Joseph with lowly reverence advanced, fell down at his father's feet, and would have asked his blessing; but as his soul had not power to give action to his lips, Jacob would have raised up his son; but being overcome with rapturous joy, he sunk down beside him with his head upon Joseph's, and thus for a season father and son both continued speechless, to the great fear and surprise of all the kindred company, lest such a tide of joy, bursting in upon the hearts, should throw the wheels of nature off from the axis, and prove fatal to their desirable lives. At length each labouring heart vested itself in a flood of tears, which the father shed upon the son, and the son upon the father. When the use of speech was regained, nothing was to be heard, but O my son! O my father! my son, my father, till the tide of passion began to abate. Then both hearts were lifted up with grateful acknowledgments of the goodness of God's holy providence, that had blessed them with a once unexpected interview. Loosed from his father's embrace, he flies to the arms of his brothers' wives, and O what endearing caresses were there betwixt him and them? O my Joseph! my Shuah! my Joseph! my Tamar! my Joseph! my Zillah! &c. &c. was all the cry. And thus they would have goue on in exchanging endearing caresses till the sun had gone down, if Judah had not put them in the mind of the expediency of proceeding on their journey.

It was agreed that Jacob and his company should come on by easy marches, as their strength and the nature of their charge would best admit of; and that Joseph and some of his brethren should go forward to Memphis, and inform his majesty of the patriarch's arrival. Accordingly, he chose five of his brethren, and departed; and, as soon as arrived, he presented them to the king, who rejoiced exceedingly at their arrival. "If Egypt," said he, "has been

such a gainer by having only one of the Hebrew lineage, what vast advantages must accrue to the land by having all the family of Israel in its possession!—What are your several occupations, my friends?" said his majesty. Joseph replied for his brethren: "May it please your majesty, my brethren are all shepherds. From their youth up, their whole business has been about cattle." Joseph chose to answer for them, partly, that by his answer he might pave a way for their dwelling in Goshen, all together with their father, separated from the Egyptians; and partly to prevent Pharaoh from conferring upon them honours of state, or employing them in matters of government, to the dissatisfaction of the Egyptians.

"Then, Joseph," said the king, "if your brethren are shepherds, I would have you fix them in a place where they are most likely to find pastures for their flocks. What think you of Goshen, Joseph?"—"Above all places, if it is your majesty's pleasure, I would choose Goshen for their residence." "Very well," said the king; let them dwell in Goshen; and you shall have letters, under my sign manual, as your authority for so doing."

When Jacob and his family arrived at Memphis, they were sent to Goshen, where the good old prince Potipherah waited their arrival, and had provided suitable accommodations for them in the city of Heliopolis. Jacob went into Joseph's palace, and was most affectionately received by the princess Asenath, who humbly begged the patriarchal blessing on her knees. Manasseh, and Ephraim likewise, came and caressed their venerable grandfather, who pressed them to his glowing bosom.

Refreshment and balmy rest having a little animated his feeble frame, Joseph took his venerable father, and presented him to the king, who was struck with solemn awe at the majesty of the patriarch's person. He continued speechless for a time, till Jacob himself broke silence in the following speech: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that has raised up Pharaoh to be at this day a nursing father to many nations. And blessed be Pharaoh of the Lord my God, who has shewn regard to my banished Joseph, and unto the seed of Israel for Joseph's sake. May thy reign be long and prosperour, and heaven-inspired peace be the possessor of thy royal breast, And

may that God, by whom thou now reignest, bestow upon thee a crown of righteousness in the eternal skies, when thou art called to leave this uncertain diadem to thy next successor!"—"For Joseph's sake," replied the king, "I embrace his father, and bid him welcome at the court of Memphis. But I pray thee, reverend old man, may I be so free as to ask thine age? I remember not that my eyes were ever struck with such a venerable form."

The patriarch replied, "But few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage; I am now in the hundred and thirtieth year of my age; but the many sorrows interwoven in my lot, and the cross providences under which I have grieved, have drawn old age upon me before the time."

The astonished monarch replied: "What! do you not account a hundred and thirty years an old age? We should think it a very extraordinary thing to see a person live so long in Egypt."

"O king!" answered Jacob, "To some it may appear an old age; but unto me, whose ancestors, father and grandfather, lived beyond a hundred and seventy years, it appears otherwise. Abraham, my grandfather, lived to the age of a hundred and seventy-five; and Isaac, my own father, to a hundred and eighty-five; so that I have not attained to the lives of my fathers."

"Abraham!" said the king, with some surprise, "We have a tradition concerning one Abraham, a private man, who overthrew the united strength of several kings. Are you a descendant of his? If so, I should be glad to have an account of the truth of this affair. As I have always considered it as almost past belief, I have given but little credit to it."

"It is no fiction, my lord," returned the patriarch; "the case was this:—In the days of Amraphel, king of Assyria, he, with other princes in alliance with him, made war with Bera, king of Sodom, and the princes in alliance with him; four kings joined their forces together, and met the five kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. in the vale of Siddim, where they routed the army of the Sodomites, and made such a slaughter amongst them, that they, finding themselves unable to make head against the enemy, were obliged to sue for peace; which could not be obtained but upon

condition of becoming tributary to the conquerors. This they were obliged to submit to, however reluctant. Twelve years they paid the stipulated sum; and, in the thirteenth year, supposing themselves in a condition to resist, they refused to pay it any longer. Wherefore the confederate Assyrians came again under arms, and ravaged all the countries in friendship with Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. The Rephaims, Zuzims, Emims, Horites, Amalekites, and Amorites, felt the severity of their rage. At last, the kings of Sodom having levied a numerous army, went forth against them, and joined battle in the valley of Brimstone Pits. But, as before, the effeminate inhabitants of Sodom, &c. could not stand before the warlike Assyrians. Many of them fell in the action, and the rest were totally routed; Sodom plundered and sacked; and Lot, Abraham's nephew, was carried away captive. As soon as my grandfather heard of his kinsman's captivity, resolving upon his redemption, he armed three hundred and eighteen valiant young men, born in his own house, and pursued them unto Dan, where he found them, in a careless and insecure manner, rioting upon the spoils of their late conquest. Sable night, enveloping the land in darkness, greatly favoured his design; he divided his little army into three companies, two of which were ordered to fetch a compass round, and attack the camp at different places, whilst Abraham attacked it on the side next unto him. No sooner had consternation spread itself among the Assyrians, than Lot heard and knew the voice of the Hebrews. They set all the prisoners at liberty, and clothed them with the armour of the slaughtered Assyrians; when, joining with Abraham's Hebrews, they dealt destruction throughout the whole camp, and thousands of the enemy bit the ground in death. Those that escaped out of the camp sought for safety in flight, and were pursued as far as Damascus. So effectually did Abraham follow his blow, that he rescued from the spoilers every prisoner, and all the goods of which they had plundered the sacked cities, and utterly destroyed the four depredating tyrants."—"It was always my opinion," said the monarch, "that Joseph was descended of illustrious ancestors; and your account of Abraham sufficiently confirms it. Your family, my good old friend, has provided a saviour for Egypt in the person of Joseph; and

it is the least thing we can do, in return, to take care of his father's house during the scarcity. Go, good old man, and dwell in the land; the best of it is before you. And you, Joseph, know it is the will of your king, that you amply provide for all your family, and appoint their dwelling most agreeable to their own inclinations."

The severity of the famine was now felt in every part of the land, and no provision was to be met with but what was drawn from Joseph's granaries; whereby the king's exchequer became immensely rich. For first, he gathered up all the money in Egypt in exchange for his corn; when money failed, he received their cattle instead thereof; and when their cattle were all become the king's property, they brought their slaves and bondmen, and exchanged them for corn. Then they sold every man his landed estate to procure bread for their mouths; and at last they gave up themselves for bondmen and bondwomen unto Pharoah, in consideration of being fed with necessary food. Thus the whole land of Egypt, and all that it contained, became Pharoah's property, and no subject had any thing left which he could call his own.

The seventh year of the famine elapsed, Joseph issued a proclamation, inviting every person to take possession of his alienated estate, to come and receive seed-corn at the king's granaries, wherewithal to sow their fields. Now he returned to every man his horses, camels, and black cattle, and all that the famine occasioned them to part with, except their money; only requiring, that a fifth part of the increase of all their lands should be faithfully delivered up at the royal magazines. But surely never were people more astonished than at this unexpected restitution of their estates, and restoration of their liberty, after they and all they had were become the sole property of the king. And never was monarch better pleased with the conduct of a minister, than Pharoah was, to see his people, by Joseph's wisdom and moderation, freed from slavery, in a manner which secured the lasting dignity and affluence of the crown. To the mutual satisfaction of both prince and people, it was established by an act of state into a law, that the people should enjoy their possessions unmolested, and that the fifth part of all increase should be Pharoah's for ever.

It was now that Sabrina, the wife of Potiphar, was taken sick unto death; and, as she found herself confirmed in her virtue, she ventured to request a visit from Joseph, that she might have an opportunity to confess her folly to him in the presence of her husband, and implore forgiveness of the injuries he had sustained upon her account.

"O Joseph!" said she, "it is less shame to confess a crime than to be guilty of it. I need not repeat the baseness of my former guilt to you, who have been so feelingly sensible. I wanted you now that I might unbosom myself to you, in the presence of my worthy lord, before I die. I admire that virtue which made you resist the temptation I laid for you. It has for some years been the object of my imitation; and, I think, I have felt something of its sweetness. I can tell you, that, had you complied with my wild and unlawful desires, you would now have been the object of my aversion, Joseph, even as you yourself foretold. But, oh! the virtue and honour were all yours, and the guilt, shame, and confusion, my own. And can my lord-chancellor indeed forgive the baseness of a woman who then criminally loved him to distraction? May Sabrina hope that she dies under the friendship of injured Joseph? that all resentment is departed from his generous bosom, and that he can freely forgive his most violent persecutor?"

"Madam," replied Joseph, "my mind is a stranger to resentment, and was so from the first: even when I felt most the power of your revenge, you was the object of my warmest pity. I felt it as an evil of affliction, which it was better to submit to, than to an evil of sin. I judged that the omnipresent God would by some means bring good out of it to me, and therefore I cheerfully endured it. It would, madam, be impious in an high degree, did I forget the means by which my God has advanced me to power, and it would be little less than devilish, to retain revenge against the instruments he might see meet to make use of. By your means, madam, I was cast into prison, where I met with the butler and baker; where also I first saw my love Asenath. By their means I was made known unto Pharoah, by whose goodness I was raised to power; so that from the great good arising to me from the little inconvenience I suffered through my then misled mistress,

I should be worse than an infidel, if I did not from my heart forgive the lady Sabrina. I rejoiced to hear of your virtue returning to its course, and your affections settled upon their proper object, and I now rejoice to see you in this penitent frame of spirit; for whosoever confess and forsake their sins, shall find mercy."

When Joseph returned home, he found a poor man at his gate, soliciting relief of his servants. By his appearance, it seemed, that he had heretofore been blessed with better days, for even the ruin was noble. The servants had each of them contributed liberally, and amongst them had made him up a purse of fifty pieces, and besides recommended him to the consideration of their lord. Joseph's humanity was such, that he never shut his door upon the poor and needy: yet seldom did he relieve, before he had properly inquired with tenderness into the case. Always observing this rule, to put the suppliant to as little pain as possible.

The stranger being introduced into the governor's presence, he was desired to give some account of the cause of his misfortunes.

"I am by birth," said he, "an Ishmaelite, who traded from the land of Gilead to Egypt. It is some few years since that, having greatly increased my substance, and added to the number of my servants, I ventured to separate myself from the caravan, with which I usually had travelled; supposing I could make greater expedition when alone, than when tied to the rules of the company. But I soon found that he who maketh haste to be rich, shall presently come to poverty: for the very first journey I made with my own household train, I was beset on a fatal night by a band of thievish Arabs, against whom I was not able to make head. All my merchandise was siezed, myself and servants taken prisoners, and basely treated whilst I continued with them. On the third night I found an opportunity of making my escape, which I effected, although not without danger. In the night I travelled, being well acquainted with the wilderness, and through the day I lurked in some lonesome thicket, till I got within the borders of Egypt; when I made the best of my way towards the metropolis, expecting to find relief, in those who stood indebted to me for merchandise before then received. But,

alas! I found there was such universal insolvency among my chapmen, that I could obtain no relief at their hands. The late famine, my lord, disables many an honest man from paying his just debts. I have been seeking throughout the capital, and all the neighbouring towns, for an amiable young man, an Hebrew, whom I brought down into Egypt, and sold to his lordship the general, near twenty years ago. As I am persuaded that if he lives, he fills some high department; could I meet with him, I doubt not but I should find a friend in the time of necessity."

"What is your name, my friend," said the governor; "and what was the name of the young Hebrew?"—"My name," replied he, "is Alvah, and my friend's name was Joseph, the son of Jacob."—"I am Joseph," returned the governor. "You have found your Joseph, your young Hebrew; and I will befriend you Alvah." He said, and flew to his friend's embrace, saying, "O my Alvah! my friend, I grieve for your distresses, yet I rejoice that it is in the power of my hand to help you. But let me first pay my just debts, by returning the money you forced upon me at our parting, Alvah. Here he ordered seven hundred pieces to be counted down, and said, "I insist upon it, if you love me, my friend, that you will accept of this as principal and interest, without making any words at all about it. And do give me a just state of all the debts owing to you by the Egyptians, and I will be your paymaster, Alvah." Overwhelmed with gratitude, the good old Ishmaelite could not speak a word. He hardly knew whether the whole was not a dream. At last, he gave vent to the swellings of his heart, by shedding a flood of tears: then said, "Blessed be God, I have found you my son, and you are Joseph still! Riches and grandeur have not divorced virtue from your noble mind."

SOCINIANISM

BROUGHT TO THE TEST;

OR,

JESUS CHRIST PROVED TO BE EITHER THE ADORABLE GOD, OR A NOTORIOUS IMPOSTOR:

IN

TWENTY LETTERS

TO THE

REVEREND DOCTOR PRIESTLEY;

IN WHICH IT APPEARS,

THAT IF JESUS CHRIST IS NOT A DIVINE PERSON, THE MOHAMMEDAN IS, IN ALL RESPECTS, PREFERABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, AND THE KORAN A BETTER BOOK THAN THE BIBLE.

If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

1 Kings, xviii. 21.

SOCINIANISM, &c.

LETTER I.

Reverend Sir,

Calling the other day at your bookseller's shop, I saw a pamphlet lying on the counter, entitled. "A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters on the Subject of Church Discipline, with a Preliminary Discourse concerning the Spirit of Christianity and the Corruption of it by False Notions of Religion," by Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F. R. S. and which the booksellers recommended to me *as a very sensible pamphlet.* Forgetting that it is the business of a dealer to speak well of the commodity he sells, I took the book upon his recommendation, somewhat encouraged by the ensigns of honour which the author trailed after him, as LL.D. F. R. S. supposing that little imperfection could lurk under such specious titles: but if I live to buy another new book, I shall pay more regard to my own judgment, than to the bookseller's recommendation; for to tell you the truth, Doctor, your performance does not altogether answer the character with which it was honoured. I had not read far in your Preliminary Discourse, ere I found a design of commencing your humble correspondent; the farther I read, the more my purpose was confirmed, which, the better to execute, I waited on your bookseller again to procure some more of your pamphlets. To him I communicated my design of commencing hostilities against your writings. He benevolently wished me to take care of myself, alleging, that I should find the Rev. Dr. Priestley an able antagonist. I like him the better for that, said I, for there will be the more honour in contending with him; besides, there is some chance of his deeming me so diminutive, as to leave me entirely possessed of the field, and that will be thought by many to be a complete victory on my side, that is, on the side of common sense.

As you, sir, have engrossed the whole of rational reli-

gion on your side of the question, you cannot be offended if I lay claim to common sense as my companion. And now, to clear the way to a fair field for our literary combat, permit me to tell you that I myself am not in the highest estimation for orthodoxy; nor have the Orthodox Dissenters so much as hinted a desire of my appearing your antagonist; neither have any of them such a high opinion of either my learning or abilities, as to suppose me capable of discomfiting the Rev. Dr. Priestley. On the contrary, I am credibly informed, that many of them are exceedingly grieved at my precipitancy and fool-hardiness in daring to attack a gentleman so very much my superior in all respects. Whether these good people tremble with a pious fear for the ark of the Lord, or indulge a secret envy against me for assuming honour so eminent, and are afraid that I may appear in a more advantageous point of view than they could wish, I have not as yet been able to discover. But this I can assure you, that the undertaking is quite voluntary; therefore if a shameful defeat should in the issue be my lot, let the disgrace of it be candidly laid at my door, as a brat entirely of my own begetting.

As it is not my intention to call any names, to rake up the dust of any of the dead, or in the least to meddle with your private personal character, or education, which I believe has been much more liberal than that to which I have any pretensions; I beg we may have no talk of burning our Bibles, or hanging, shooting, or drowning ourselves, as, in the controversy between the Rev. Mr. Venn and yourself,* you politely have advised him to threaten in future. There will be no occasion for the least degree of personal abuse between you and me, if we both act up to our profession, *of simply seeking out the truth.* But as much study is a weariness of the flesh, it shall be lawful for us, now and then, to accompany our serious argument with a little ridicule, and to sneer jocosely at each other's folly: for which I perceive your reverence possesseth very respectable talents, as appears from your letter to the vicar of Huddersfield.

I blame the Protestant Dissenter for expressing his fear of your great abilities in point of ridicule; seeing every one who engages in religious controversy must expect to meet with it, unless there be a happy defect of genius attending

* Dr. Priestley's Letters to the Rev. Mr. Venn.

his antagonist. Religious controversies differ from all others in this, that they rouse up the little wit we are possessed of; or, if destitute of wit, all the anger and ill-nature mixed with our constitution; for it is no uncommon thing for religious combatants to leave the spirit of the Gospel behind them, and by wrath to seek the righteousness of God: therefore, no man should enter into controversies of this sort without first sitting down and counting the cost, and trying his own heart, whether he has temper enough to bear the poignance of that satire which he is likely to meet with, without injuring his cause by an unbecoming anger. Besides, as serious disquisitions are very tiresome to read, how does the Protestant Dissenter think that the reader can have patience to keep the disputants company, unless the muscles of his countenance are now and then relaxed into a pleasant grin by a home-stroke of satirical wit? But ill-nature being discovered, though it should be even religious ill-nature, is sure to give disgust to every reader of common understanding.

I confess that, of late years, I myself also am inclined to think that, to load infidels with epithets of reproach, is not the happiest method of attempting their conversion; and I hope to convince you, sir, ere I have done, that, for the very same reason, Dr. Priestley takes the wrong way to lead the Orthodox Dissenters to correct the errors into which he supposes them to have fallen. Neither do I as yet see cause to be in any wise angry with a man, because God has not given him the same degree of rational discernment which I flatter myself he has conferred on me: nor would I scold at those who do not speak well of that Gospel which I believe in my heart to be hid from their eyes. If people are in circumstances dangerous to their everlasting concerns, they are certainly more proper objects of my pity than of my resentment. With as much propriety might I be offended at a poor man who was born blind and continues so, because he is not a judge of colours; or with a deaf man, because he understands not the harmony of sounds. But if one will take upon him to prate about the colours, which are only discernable by the eye, and the other will attempt to display the beauties of harmony, which can only be percieved by the ear;—you know, Doctor, I may very consistently laugh at their folly, even whilst I pity them for their

want of sight and hearing. However, I forbid all anger between you and me, as we are pretty near upon a par in this respect, each of us firmly believing himself to be the farthest enlightened.

I am persuaded that two men cannot be found who in general differ more widely than Dr. Priestly and myself, and that too in the very fundamentals of the Christian faith, and yet there are some things in which we are perfectly agreed; and although I consider your system, in general, as utterly inconsistent with that Gospel in which lies all my hope, I discern something in your writing that is worthy of imitation. The openness and freedom with which you express your sentiments, though frequently, as I think, crude and indigested, undoubtedly prove the uprightness of your intentions, and effectually exculpate you from the charge of disingenuity and wilful perversion of truth; which is farther apparent from your readiness to correct what appears to you upon convincing evidence to have been wrong in former publications, as in your additions to the address on the Lord's supper. This symptom of genuine uprightness is so singular, and so rarely found in controversial writers, that I thought I could not do you justice, without taking particular notice of it, notwithstanding I profess myself an avowed enemy to what you call Rational Christianity. And I assure you, sir, I hold myself obliged to follow *Dr. Priestley*, in this part of his conduct, whenever my circumstances shall call me to it, which perhaps may be sooner than I at present expect. But, as it is quite unfashionable for polemic writers to stand long in bestowing panegyrics upon their antagonists, like counsellers at the bar, I proceed to inform you, that my present business is not to compliment much farther, but to point out more mistakes for your correction and amendment.

Having got in a great measure free, as I think, from the trammels of tradition myself, so as to regard no authority distinct from that of Christ in the Scripture, and to follow no man, or set of men, knowingly, one hair's breadth farther than he, or they, follow the blessed Jesus; I should not have cared to enter the lists with you if, you had not declared your belief of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and duty. For if fathers and reformers are admitted as decisive judges in religious controversy, the authority of

the Scriptures is not only abridged, and the Redeemer's glory, as prophet and lawgiver in his church, elipsed, but the subject is more perplexed, and the issue of the debate greatly protracted. I heartily concur with you in "believing the Bible to be the only rule;" and, to adopt your own words, sincerely "wish that all persons, of all sects and parties, would study their Bibles more, and books of controversy less."* Yet I shall have no objection to all people, of all sects, reading what may pass between you and me. I am ready to think, indeed, that it is usual for polemic writers to suppose that all books of controversy are hurtful, except those of which they themselves happen to be the authors. For instance, there is no man ever exclaimed more against controversy, as pernicious to the souls of men and the interests of true religion, than the reverend Mr. John Wesley, and yet I do not know one man who has been more frequently dabbling in that polluting puddle, than John Wesley, A. M. sometimes Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford.

The professed principle, sir, upon which you set out, page 1 of the Preliminary Discourse, is also very agreeable to me; and by it I mean to try the fabric you have built upon it; therefore shall recite it at large in this place; then I shall openly avow what I design in the following letters.

"Every set of religious sentiments must have its influence upon the mind, and produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct. Christianity is by no means an exception to this general observation. Its effect upon the disposition of the mind is peculiar to itself: and except we feel as Christians, we cannot act as such."†

By this rule, let the religion of the Rev. Dr. Priestley and that of his humble servant be tried, and that which really produceth the worst effects, be rejected as spurious, irrational, and unscriptural. Dependant upon the Bible, a better rule could hardly have been given than this of your own. "Every set of religious sentiments," rational and irrational, orthodox and heretical, must have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct."

* Considerations on Differences of Opinion, &c. p. 24. † Prel. Disc. p. 3.

"Must," from the nature of things, and the relation between cause and effect; insomuch that from the temper and conduct of any man, you may, from Dr. Priestley's maxim, form an exact idea of the propriety or impropriety of his religious sentiments. You say, "that Christianity is by no means an exception to this general observation." I hope not. For my part, I can form no idea of such a Christianity as hath not a proper influence upon those who cordially embrace it: of course, had I been in your place, I should have deemed this remark altogether superfluous and unnecessary. But I dare say that you and I have very different views of Christianity itself, whatever agreement may be between us respecting its effects upon the temper and conduct of its professors. The Gospel which Paul preached, and the other Gospel which he supposed some others might preach, are, no doubt, each of them productive of effects suitable to their different natures.

Having thus settled preliminaries, I will now, sir, point out the ground I intend to occupy, and the method by which the combat is to be managed; for I must assure you I am somewhat like the hero, who would fight only after his own country fashion.

1. I shall give you a little gentle correction for your want of charity for those same orthodox gentlemen, and teach you for the future, to use your betters either with more respect, or to be more consistent in your censure.

2. I design to prove that much of the Pharisee lurks under the specious name of Rational Dissenter, which you are pleased to assume, to distinguish yourself from others whom you call Orthodox.

3. I shall shew you how perplexed you have rendered the doctrines of the person of Christ, of the atonement, &c.

4. Gloss a little upon the visible, well-attested fruits of your divinity, as they discover themselves among the Rational Dissenters.

And, lastly, if any thing besides occur to me whilst I am discussing these points, I shall make no scruple of superadding it to my plan.

Thus, sir, I have gone as far as I intended in my first letter; so shall conclude, with assuring you that I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

LETTER II.

To the Rev. Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S.

REVEREND SIR,

I AM abundantly the more careful in reciting the honours of your name, that the public may see the dignity of the company which I choose to keep; according to an ancient injunction laid upon me by my father, who, had he lived to see this day, would have rejoiced that I had got such an honourable correspondent as yourself. I think, indeed, that by this time, we may esteem you as the most rational advocate of the Rational Dissenters, if we may judge by the eminent figure you make amongst them. I, for my part, am, from the respectableness of your talents, very willing to believe that you are the fittest person with whom they could trust the management of their cause against all that are called Orthodox. But, in the name of common sense, and *rational religion*, what have the Orthodox Dissenters done to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, that he should set them forth in such a disagreeable point of view, and treat them in a manner so severe and unmerciful? Really, Doctor, you convince me, that you are but a man of like passions with myself, and not quite so free from the prejudice of party as you seem to imagine. To make use of your own words,* I really think that "we should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity, from the Christian than from the mere man of this world. The passions of the latter (the man of this world) would be apt to run into personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former (the Christian) would not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of, the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule, we may, in some measure, 'try the spirits whether they be of God.' But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." This is certainly a good rule; and I would observe upon it, that if we could only

* Difference of Opinion, p. 5.

govern our spirits, as well as we do our pens, and act as well as we speak, there would be more propriety in our conduct than there usually is, and our character in life would be more respectable.

This being given as one of Dr. Priestley's standing rules, "for the finding out of spirits;" upon seeing it, one would have thought that even the Orthodox Dissenters should have met with nothing from his distinguished pen but the utmost candour, meekness, generosity, benevolence, and brotherly affection, which he himself lays down as the fruits of a Christian spirit; especially when we find him so solemnly and seriously deprecating a departure from this rule in the following words.* "God forbid that I should take upon me to condemn any of his creatures. Himself only knowns our hearts, and he will render to every man according to his works." But either the Orthodox Dissenters are thought not to be the creatures of God, or the Rev. Dr. Priestley was of a different opinion when he wrote the *Preliminary Discourse concerning the Spirit of Christianity.* I am not absolutely sure which of these was the case; but this I am certain of, that in the said discourse, pages 16 and 17, having traced the spring of the "penances, and tiresome repetition of paternosters and Ave-Marias, as a mere bodily exercise, in the Church of Rome, and observed that it is pretty evident that going to church and attending prayers, is considered by many members of the Church of England in the same light," you remark that, "this they look upon in the highest and most proper sense their duty, and they hardly ever attend to it as the means of cultivating good dispositions, and fitting them for proper conduct in life." But it not being deemed sufficient to point out the absurdity of the Papists, and of the good people of the Church of England, you go on to deal the severest blows among the poor Orthodox Dissenters, as abundantly worse, and more dangerous than both the others; "and," say you, "the frequent, long, and severe exercises, by which the Orthodox Dissenters distinguish themselves, are of the same nature. They serve to discharge their consciences as a positive duty; but have little influence to improve their disposition and conduct." From a man of such moderation as the Rev. Dr. Priestley gives

* Difference of Opinion, p. 4.

himself out to be, this might have been thought sufficient: but the home-blow is yet to come; and thus it follows: "Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking that there is a striking resemblance between these professors of Christianity, and the Pharisees in our Saviour's time, those who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; who devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers; and that, were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity." Indeed, Doctor! Is it possible that the impulse is so strong, that you cannot resist it, but must out with it, in opposition to all your own excellent rules of meekness, candour, and benevolence? Could not you have recollected that just remark,* "We are certainly all of us fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence." This rule would have pleaded somewhat with you in favour of the poor Orthodox Dissenters, had it been observed; and I have not, for my part, skill enough to account for it, why great men should lay down the best of maxims and rules for others to follow, without paying a becoming regard to them themselves. I find myself just now under an impulse also, and cannot help saying, that the above serious admonition † seems pretty near as necessary to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, as to the Rev. Mr. Venn, vicar of Huddersfield; for his severity to the deists, &c. is thoroughly matched by yours, sir, towards the Orthodox Dissenters. What an inconsistent creature is man! for this same Dr. Priestley, who takes upon him to accuse, judge, and condemn, the Orthodox Dissenters, tells us plainly,‡ "that there are such well-known instances of the force of prejudice, that he had rather ascribe any opinion, how absurd soever, or any defence, how weak soever, in a man, how sensible and intelligent soever in other respects, to wrong judgment, than to a bad heart;" and, after all, most certainly ascribes the conduct and principles of

* See Dr. Priestley's Difference of Opinion, p. 31.

† The admonition referred to is found in Dr. Priestley's Observations on Differences of Opinion, p. 5. "We should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity, from the Christian, than from the mere man of this world. The passions of the latter would be apt to run into personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former would, not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of, the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule we may, in some measure, try the spirits whether they be of God. But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

‡ Difference of Opinion, p. 10.

these same Orthodox Dissenters to badness of heart, rather than wrong judgment; for there is said to be a striking likeness between them and the pharisees, who undoubtedly were influenced by badness of heart rather than misinformed judgments. "How should I be affected at the great day of judgment," says your reverence,* "to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment also, of an adversary, whom I should have treated in so illiberal and insulting a manner?" This is intended for Mr. Venn's consideration; and I assure you, Doctor, I think it will not be altogether amiss that you should a little ponder upon it yourself: for to give good advice to others, and to neglect it ourselves, is somewhat like the conduct of watermen, who look one way whilst they are rowing another.

Nevertheless, I assure you, that I by no means impute this inconsistency of yours to any dishonesty of design, but to "the force of prejudice, and wrong judgment," which have led you to throw out your censure, without fully considering its weight and propriety; or, indeed, how grievously it clasheth with your own avowed maxims.

Now, Doctor, that you may see the full scope of your censure referred to, I shall be free enough to animadvert upon it in my own way: and, in the first place, touching what you say of the paternosters and Ave-Marias of the Church of Rome, and the prayers of many of the members of the Church of England, being mere bodily exercises, I have little to say, having not yet attained to an absolute certainty, whether all that have used these things had no farther views in them than merely to discharge their consciences. Besides, I have but a very dull faculty, in point of discerning hearts, any other way than by outward actions; moreover, I think it not amiss to leave it to the parties concerned to defend themselves against your attack, seeing neither of them have retained me as their advocate. But, as for the poor Orthodox Dissenters, you have used them so unmercifully, Doctor, that common humanity would induce me to interfere, had I even no fellow-feeling with them in the common cause.

"The frequent, long, and severe exercises, by which the Orthodox Dissenters distinguish themselves, are of the same nature." As to the frequency of their exercises, really you

* Difference of Opinion, p. 11.

must needs be mistaken; for, to my certain knowledge, they differ little, if any thing at all, from the exercises of the Rational Dissenters themselves. Verily, sir, it is my charitable opinion, that few, of either the one or the other, are in danger of damnation for preaching too often and praying too much. But their exercises are *long*, you say, and this perhaps may be thought to give them a papistical turn. In this also I am of opinion, that the practice of the Rationals themselves will exculpate the Orthodox. *Your* exercises, Doctor, will measure pretty near two hours in length; the exercises of the Orthodox, generally speaking, never exceed, and very rarely extend to, that time: so that I direct the jury, who are to determine in the case, I mean the public, to bring in their verdict, *Not Guilty*, in favour of the Orthodox. The greatest danger is likely to arise from the third quality of their exercises, namely, their severity, which is by far the most puzzling point, as the Orthodox and Rational Dissenters, I much fear, are not very likely at present, perfectly to understand one another. Some of them, however, will be ready, to allege, that they enjoy as much pleasure in preaching the Gospel, as Dr. Priestley does in his philosophical researches, and that they are apprehensive of no more severity in the one, than he is of in the other. Nay, they would be apt to go farther, and to assure you, that the most pleasant part of their lives is that which is employed in the work of the sanctuary. Now, really, sir, it is not easy to say, how that exercise, in which a man delights, can be thought by him to be severe: and I suppose you will allow, that every man by his own feelings ought to be the most proper judge for himself. Far be it from me, by the way, to take upon me to determine the exact measure of severity, which those gentlemen feel in religious exercises, who are ministers merely for the sake of a livelihood. In general, it is a stated law, *That all carrying against the grain is unpleasant:* but what is this to those who, having themselves felt the terrors of the Lord, are stirred up to warn men to flee from the wrath to come? upon whom necessity is laid, and who are miserable, if they preach not the Gospel? They are constrained by the love they bear to Jesus, and to the souls of men, to be instant in preaching the word in season and out of season, if by any means they may be useful in promoting the salvation of lost perishing sinners. The case

you know is very different between these two sets of men; and, of course, their feelings must also be different.

But "these severe exercises of the Orthodox Dissenters are of the very same nature with popish penances, and tiresome repetitions of paternosters and Ave-Marias." O! Doctor, where was your candour, your benevolence, and your brotherly affection, when you wrote this discourse? Indeed, sir, if Rational religion doth not find out a more happy method of discovering herself, I shall never be able to join any of her societies, but must even be content to bear the reproach of Orthodoxy. But, you know, and I know too, that popish penances, tiresome repetitions of paternosters, &c. are enjoined in the church of Rome with a view to procure the favour of God, &c. And you say that the frequent, long, and severe exercises of Orthodox Dissenters are of the same nature. Permit me to ask you, if you really think that the same Orthodox Dissenters perform their severe exercises with a design to merit at the hands of God? Perhaps, sir, you may recollect who it is that blames them for Pharisaism, for considering themselves as saved, and secure in the favour of the Almighty, whilst they suppose that multitudes are under his wrath, and must perish. Turn, I pray you, good Doctor, to page 18 of your Differences of Opinion, and there see the sentiments of the Orthodox, as "that the grace that saves them is irresistible and irrevocable, so that they can never lose the divine favour." Certainly these words, if they contain their sentiments, must utterly exclude all pretensions to merit in their severe exercises: and how then can one of your professed candour say, that their exercises are of the very same nature with popish penances and paternosters? I really wish, that our zeal for party-religion may not in future be injurious to common sense as well as Christian charity.

I pray you, sir, how came you so well to know, that their frequent, long, and severe exercises, have little influence to improve their disposition and conduct? You know well enough that your acquaintance with the generality of them is comparatively narrow, and your intercourse with them very small. And perhaps your acquaintance with any of them is too imperfect to authorize such a scandalous stigma as this with which you brand them. Admitting that you have tasted of the bitterness of some of their spirits, and have

smarted by lashes from the pens of one or two individuals among them, will that be a sufficient warrant for such a general and indiscriminating censure which you pass upon them all? When do you think, Doctor, that you and I shall learn, in our controversies, to do to others as we would wish them to do unto us? That is, to act up to our own salutary rules. But, as you say concerning the Deists, I may say concerning the Orthodox Dissenters; do, sir, sit down calmly, and with seriousness consider their objections to your Rational religion, and by no means treat them with that contempt which they do not deserve.

The answer to the heaviest part of the charge you bring against them, must be left till I have the honour of writing to you again; for I will not trouble you with too long a letter at one time, lest the exercise of reading it should be thought somewhat severe, like the religion of the Orthodox. I shall therefore conclude, remaining.

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER III.

REVEREND SIR,

I HAVE not yet done with animadverting on the uncharitable censure you have passed against the Orthodox Dissenters; therefore, to make you sensible that you are not such a competent judge of men, and of the spirit which influence them, as some may think, my business in this letter shall be to point out the real import of the dreadful sentence you have pronounced against them, so as that all may read and understand it. But, as I would do the strictest justice to all men living, I purpose to keep up a proper distinction between Dr. Priestley as a Rational Christian, and the same Dr. Priestley as an honest man; and, whilst I muster all my forces to oppose him under the former character, I shall give him all due honour and respect under the latter. With this necessary distinction therefore in my eye, I shall proceed to shew that the Rev. Dr. Priestley, as a Rational Dissenter, has drawn the most detestable picture of, and brought the heaviest accusations against, the Orthodox Dissenters, that I remember ever to have seen or heard; and, by the way,

That the same Rev. Dr. Priestley, as a man of philosophic candour and humanity, has boldly acquitted the said Orthodox of all the charges brought against them by the Rational Dissenters, by his pointing out another class of people, to whom his censure is perfectly applicable.

1. Then, Doctor, for I love to be methodical, let us take a view of the charge which you, as a Rational Dissenter, bring against the Orthodox, and we shall find it truly alarming; perfectly unmixed with that amiable charity, so justly celebrated in your performances. "Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking, that there is a striking resemblance between these professors of Christianity, and the Pharisees in our Saviour's time, those who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel, who devoured widows' houses, and, for a pretence, made long prayers; and that, were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity."* Why the Pharisees in our Saviour's time should be chosen as the original, after which the picture of the Orthodox Dissenters is drawn, I cannot certainly say; having had but little opportunity of informing myself whether there is any real dissimilitude between the ancient and the modern Pharisees. However, were a skilful limner to copy the spirit and conduct of the Pharisees of our own time, he would produce a picture even disagreeable and shocking enough, without having the trouble and expense of travelling back the space of seventeen centuries for a more perfect pattern. Now, that we may the better know whether the Orthodox, or the Rational Dissenters, have the clearest title to the honour of being classed with the Pharisees in our Saviour's time, it may not be amiss for me to take down the *original* from behind the curtain, and a little to mark the outlines of that distinguished character. This may bring the matter to a fair issue; and I believe I shall not need to put myself to much expense or to the trouble of severe study in this affair; for I have got what suits my purpose in an old sermon of mine: for you must know, sir, that I am, like yourself, "paid for haranguing the people once a week." I think you will agree with me, that the Rational Dissenter has discovered but a very slender degree of that charity which Doctor Priestley so warmly recommends when he so positively declares, that there is such a striking resem-

* Prelim. Disc. p. 17.

blance between the Orthodox Dissenters and the Pharisees; for,

1. The Pharisees, in general, were hypocrites; and, as appears from the testimony of Jesus, took up a dissembled religion to cover their avaricious purposes: which must be the character of the Orthodox Dissenters, if the resemblance between them and the Pharisees is so striking as you, sir, in the person of a Rational Dissenter, have been pleased to affirm; but, how you could come at this knowledge, without having attained the wonderful secret of discerning hearts, is not so easy for me to comprehend. But the Rev. Dr. Priestley, in the person of an honest man, is absolutely of a different opinion; for, to the confusion of this uncharitable Rational Dissenter, he tells us plainly, that "he would at any time rather impute the mistaken conduct of the Orthodox Dissenters to wrong judgment, than to badness of heart."* But, if the whole had not been imputed to badness of heart, this Rational Dissenter, had not been so exceedingly and irresistibly struck with the exact resemblance. For my own part, I most sincerely agree with Dr. Priestley, the honest man, and am so sensible "that we are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence,† that I should not dare even to retort any thing which apparently carried in it a charge of hypocrisy." Therefore I signify it as my opinion, that the exhibiter of this charge against the Orthodox be summoned to the bar of the Rational Dissenters, and on his knees receive a sharp rebuke for having betrayed their want of candour and charity, which ought by all means to have been kept a secret, as they wish, for the prosperity of Rational religion. Indeed, sir, it never was my intention to charge your friends with hypocrisy; but if Dr. Priestley, who is so much better acquainted with them than I am, will do it, the blame you know can, with no propriety, be laid at my door. And, to my certain knowledge, what the Doctor says of them, can with no justice be said of many who are called Orthodox. That all may see that I do not belie you, reverend sir, I shall lay before the reader your own words, and then leave it to his determination, whether they actually amount to a direct charge of dissimulation and hypocrisy. In your Essay on Church Discipline, page 55, speaking of the Ra-

* Diff. of Opin. p. 10. † Ibid. p. 31.

tional Dissenting ministers, you say, that they "entertaining sentiments in religion different from those of their people, and such as their people would not have borne with; they endeavoured to keep them out of view." This is a very fair and honest confession, indeed! In the truth and uprightness of your heart you have displayed the disingenuous conduct of your learned brethren, without any regard had to the consequences which might attend such a fatal discovery. I own, however, that it is somewhat droll that the Rational Dissenters should be the only people who are unacquainted with the real sentiments of their ministers; and it is every whit as droll, that one of themselves should publish the tremendous secret, "that their ministers are so wrapped in disguise when they come to the pulpit, that it is impossible for the congregation to know of a truth that they are entertained with the real sentiments of the preacher." This is one of the many advantages arising from the farther reformation of religion. And really it is pretty clear, that these same Rational gentlemen differ exceedingly from Paul the apostle, who shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God. For my own part, I have not been accustomed to entertain such a very mean opinion of the Rational ministers, but I dare not reject such testimony as that of the Rev. Dr. Priestley. Were I a person who loved to hear an evil report of others, as some people do, I should be very apt to think, that such men were hypocrites like the Pharisees; but happily for me, sir, you have saved me that trouble and mortification, by bringing home the charge upon them yourself. "If the minister be a man of integrity, he will always preach, at least consistently with his real sentiments."* Indeed one would think so; and from hence it will be inferred, that if those, who are men of integrity, will all of them always preach consistently with their real sentiments, it must follow, that those who keep their real sentiments as much as possible out of view, cannot be men of integrity; that is, they must be dissemblers, for they dissemble their sentiments. This is very much like hypocrisy; but I will not absolutely affirm, that the gentlemen are hypocrites. Now, really, sir, such is my extensive charity for you, that I could almost find in my heart to believe, that you made use of

* Church Discipline, p. 109.

the name *Orthodox Dissenters*, as a cover to your real designs; and that, whilst you say here is a striking resemblance between the Orthodox and the Pharisees, you all the while mean the *Rational Dissenting ministers*, whom you did not choose to offend; and therefore cared not to mention them by name. And I think this is the most favourable point of view in which I can consider your censure—when I turn it into an honest, well-designed artifice for correcting the vices of your brethren; between whom and the Pharisees there seems to be a very considerable likeness, in point of hypocrisy, provided that your account of them is picturesque and genuine.

2. The Pharisees, in our Saviour's time, gloried so much in their personal attainments, that they could come even to the divine throne, and each of them boast of his own worthiness, saying, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." And Dr. Priestley, I hope, will give me leave to assert, that those Dissenters, who may truly be called experimental; that is, in the better sense of the word, Orthodox, are so far from this spirit, that they freely confess themselves to be the vilest of the vile. You very well know, sir, who they are that assume the name of Rational, by which they would be understood to be more enlightened than their neighbours. One would really think that this is in some measure like the spirit of those gentlemen among the Jews, who said concerning Jesus of Nazareth, Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? But as for those people, who know not the law, they are accursed. The Doctor's writings furnish instances enough, how much he is enlightened above his fellows, and especially above the Orthodox race, who do not, in his esteem, understand the Scriptures, and the religion therein contained. It is really a difficult matter to account for human conduct in general, or for yours and mine in particular, sir; for whilst you are pleased to charge the Orthodox Dissenters with Pharisaism, and of saying to others, "Stand by yourselves, we are more holy than you," you are also pleased to lead us to behold, in the persons of the Rational Dissenters themselves, the very descendants of the Pharisees in the time of our Saviour. Self-veneration, according to both Dr. Priestley and myself, is one essential part of the cha-

racter of a Pharisee. That this veneration for one's self and party, is, in any peculiar manner, the characteristic of the Orthodox Dissenters, remains for the Doctor to prove at his leisure; but that it belongs properly to the Rational Dissenter, I hope his own words will be thought a very sufficient evidence; at least, with me it weighs mightily. Says the Rational Dissenter, in his Discourse Preliminary to the Essay on Church Discipline, page 28 and 29, "I am clearly of opinion, that the character of those who may be called the more free livers (*i. e.* the more loose and profane, according to the vulgar dialect) among the Rational Dissenters, is, with respect to the true spirit of Christianity, superior to that of those who are, seemingly, the more devout of the other sort" (*i. e.* of the Orthodox Dissenters). That this passage is not quite so clear of the spirit of the Pharisee as the author could wish to have it believed, I think will appear from our considering that he hath not been candid enough to admit even the sincerity of the Orthodox in their devotion, but has represented them as only "seemingly more devout." It is not given us as a rash expression or inadvertent slip of the pen; for he tells us, that "he is clearly of this opinion;" therefore I proceed to give the true sense of the passage in my way, and it may be thus expressed. The Rev. Dr. Priestley is clearly of opinion, that the most loose and irreligious of those who think as he does, *alias* Rational Dissenters, possess more of the true spirit of Christianity, *i. e.* are better men than the strictest livers, or the most devout amongst the Orthodox. Whether this is not the depth of self-adulation, and the very spirit of the Pharisees, a small degree of intelligence will enable every reader to determine. By the way, neighbour, I should never have concerned myself with the beam which is in the eye of the Rational Dissenter, had not your reverence so grievously magnified the mote that is in the eye of the Orthodox.

3. Another part of the character of the Pharisees, is, that being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own, which is by the law, making void the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ. They had such a fond opinion of their own personal virtue and holiness, that they saw no need of Christ's righteousness imputed to justify, or his blood to atone, but took it

for granted, that they were very sufficient of themselves, "under the common assistance of the Deity,"* to do every thing necessary for procuring the favour of God and the pardon of their sins. What a conflict is here between your Treatise on Church Discipline, and your Considerations on Differences of Opinion? The common oppositions to which all Christian people are exposed from their unbelieving enemies, are thought by some to be heavy enough to bear; but how much harder must it be, when a man becomes his own opposer, as in the case of the Rev. Dr. Priestley! His Treatise on Discipline very charitably affirms, that there is a striking resemblance between the Orthodox Dissenters, and the pharisees in our Saviour's time. I have shewn, that the pharisees in our Saviour's time sought salvation only by the works of the law; and you, sir, are so obliging, in your Considerations on Different Opinions, page 18, as to demonstrate, that the Orthodox Dissenters are so far from depending on personal virtue, or the works of the law, that they believe, "that the universal Parent arbitrarily selected out of the whole number, a few, whom he designs for eternal happiness: and that, according to them, even the elect cannot be saved, till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person. The grace that saves them is irresistible and irrevocable, so that they can never lose the divine favour." Whether this account of the faith of the Orthodox be perfectly just, or in some measure warped out of the way of truth, is not the object of my present inquiry. It is enough for me to shew thereby, that the same Doctor, who brings the heavy charge against the Orthodox Dissenters, does in a very candid manner exculpate them from the guilt insinuated; as the passage above recited, even in your own sense of it, stands opposed to the tenets and spirit of the pharisees. In short, Doctor, we shall be obliged to go somewhere else to look for this same striking resemblance of the pharisees; for we have not as yet been able to find it, according to your wish, among the Orthodox Dissenters.

It is indeed remarkable, that Dr. Priestley should represent the Orthodox as holding "the opinion that men are entirely passive in the work of conversion and the new birth, entirely incapable of themselves so much as to think

* Dr. Priestley's words.

a good thought; and that saving faith consists in an acceptance of, or a dependance upon, the merits of Christ for salvation, or what they are fond of calling, throwing themselves upon Christ, or a resting upon Christ for salvation:"* and yet, in his additional observations on the Lord's supper, page 28, " to represent them as pleading and proclaiming their own goodness!" How could you, for shame, Doctor, make your appeal to common sense, in your letter to Mr. Venn? Had you taken her advice she would have made your writings as uniform, as they are well designed. But, because you have affronted her, she hath forsaken you; and you will easily guess where, I suppose, that she hath taken up her dwelling.

Now, sir, as you and I are engaged in the same pursuit, I mean to find out the real descendants of the pharisees in our Lord's time, and each of us hopes for success in his own way; will you give me leave to try how the coat will fit the Rational Dissenters themselves. The pharisees then could form no idea of the new birth and conversion, as a work of the Spirit of God, in which the subject himself is passive. This is exactly the case with the Rational Dissenters, and both the parents and children say, " How can these things be?" The pharisees knew and believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; for they knew that no man could do the works which he did, except God were with him. This believing that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, you say, implies the whole of rational Christianity.

The pharisees held it to be blasphemy in Jesus to make himself equal with God, he being, as Dr. Priestley observes, and as they asserted, " but a man like ourselves." The Rational Dissenters hold it as the greatest absurdity in us to adore the blessed Jesus as Jehovah's fellow, seeing, as they also say, he is but a man like ourselves. Indeed, Doctor, here is a wonderful likeness between their respectablenesses the pharisees in our Saviour's time, and yourselves the Rational Dissenters! How could you then ascribe that honour to the Orthodox Dissenters, which is so clearly due to the Rationals?

You tell us, in the depth of your candour, " that the pharisees strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel, that

* Prel. Disc. p. 14.

they devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers, and that there is an exact resemblance between them and the Orthodox Dissenters."*

To be serious, Doctor, do you really think that the Orthodox Dissenters have such a wide swallow as that a whole camel will down at once? Are you certainly assured that they are the very devourers of widows' houses which you represent them to be? and are you morally certain that all their long prayers are but a mere pretence? Think not to get off from the charge of uncharitableness, by alleging, that you laid not these things to the charge of the Orthodox Dissenters; seeing you assert that there is a striking resemblance between the one and the other, and give it as your opinion, that Jesus would deal equally severe with the latter as with the former; which must, in your view, suppose an equality of demerit. Yea, Doctor, you are even so struck with the disagreeable likeness, that you cannot help publishing it, so that all may discern how much like the ancient pharisees you esteem the Orthodox Dissenters.

You tell us that "if our Saviour was again to come upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity with which he treated the pharisees." He denounced every curse and woe written in the law of God against the one; and, of course, in your charitable opinion, he would do the same by the other. If he would do it on supposition he was to come again upon earth, he will certainly do it now he is in heaven; for he is the same now that he was when in a state of humiliation, being Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Is not this somewhat like judging and determining upon the state of the Orthodox Dissenters? A thing, which you would not be thought to attempt for the world. O! Doctor, let me recommend to your serious con-

* This instance of Dr. Priestley's penetration in finding out the likeness between the Orthodox Dissenters and the pharisees who swallowed camels, devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers, may be of the greatest use to the curious, by enabling them to discover the full contents of every big Orthodox belly they meet with. For instance, whenever a curious Rational happens to meet with an Orthodox teacher bearing a prominent belly, he will be instantly struck with a conviction that the Orthodox doctor is gorged with the widows' houses which he has devoured. Had I the honour of being a Rational Dissenter, and found this to be the case, I would certainly shew them less than the little mercy they have received from the Doctor; for I would follow them with prosecutions *pro bono publico* till they had cast up every poor widow's house, which now lies in ruin with them.

sideration the wholesome advice which you so liberally bestow upon Mr. Venn, respecting his want of love to those that differ from him.

The spring of this so unbecoming a censure of those, whom you are pleased sometimes to honour with the name of brethren, seems to be some irresistible impulse upon your mind: for you say, "I cannot help thinking that there is a striking likeness," &c. I have heard of strange things concerning impulses which people *could not help* complying with; yea, strange accounts of impulses, even to the greatest of evils, have been heard of; but I should not have expected to find a rational Christian reduced to the necessity of bringing the heaviest accusation against those from whom he has the happiness to differ. However, Doctor, to advert to that leading principle, upon which both you and I set out, and which is so well expressed in page 1 of your Preliminary Discourse, we may form some judgment of your set of sentiments by the influence it has upon your spirit and conduct. "Every set of religious sentiments must have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct." Doctor Priestley finds himself under such an influence that he cannot help bringing the most grievous accusation against the Orthodox Dissenters: from whence it would seem, that his set of religious sentiments has produced a very disagreeable temper and cast of thought in him; from which it is apparent that "unless he feel like a Christian he cannot act as such."

I am afraid I have been too tedious upon a subject, which cannot be the most agreeable to you; and therefore shall stop short before I have finished my design, lest the exercise should be too severe upon you, as well as upon,

Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER IV.

Indeed, Doctor, it is a certain truth, and all may depend upon it, that were I assured of having no other judge but yourself, I would much rather be a deist, than an Orthodox Dissenter, and that for reasons strong and substan-

tial. Self-love and self-preservation are principles deeply rooted in me, and prompt me, as it were by instinct, to study my own safety; and you know, sir, that it must be advisable enough for me, to wish myself of that party to which the Judge is apparently most favourable. That you have but little favour for the Orthodox Dissenters, is, by this time, pretty obvious: your tender mercies towards them are not altogether unmixed with cruelty; but your most cruel treatment of the deistical gentlemen wants not a goodly share of that candour and compassion which the Orthodox Dissenters would be glad to participate. Your conduct towards the one has been sufficiently exemplified; I shall therefore consider what aspect it bears towards the other. "Let us then sit down to a serious and impartial examination of the objections of deists to Christianity, and by no means treat them with that contempt and insolence which they have too often met with, and which they are very far from deserving. But before we attempt the vindication of any thing (*to which the deists object*), let us first consider whether we have any occasion to vindicate it at all; that is, whether it really belongs to our religion, or whether it have only been generally supposed to belong to it."* Now, why should not the Orthodox be thought to deserve the same candid and serious consideration of their objections to the Rational scheme also, instead of being treated with that contempt and insolence which they by no means deserve? seeing such treatment is likely to operate upon them to as much disadvantage as upon the Rational, "reflecting and irreproachable deists;" unless it is supposed, that, could these same gentlemen be brought over, they would make better and more Rational Christians than the Orthodox. For my own part, Doctor, seeing these same deists are such a thinking irreproachable race, and their company of course so very desirable, I give it as my advice, that, if they will not come over to the Rational Dissenters, you and your good people would be complaisant enough to go over to them, or at least, to meet them half of the very little way which the Rev. Mr. Venn has shewn to be between you and the deists.

I assure you, sir, that I am very far from treating these respectable deists with either insolence or contempt: I es-

* Preface to Considerations on the Lord's Supper, p. 9.

teem them as the creatures of the same Almighty hand that formed me; as the descendants of Adam, and my fellow-sinners, I sincerely wish their everlasting welfare. To shew that I am serious in what I say, give me leave to take this method of whispering the following secret in your ear, and that is, "I would rather choose to live under the government of a deist, than that of either a Rational or Orthodox Dissenter, providing that they were bigots to their several parties." I could give reasons for this my so singular a choice, if I was in the humour, but, at present, shall reserve them to myself, lest I should offend my good friends of every denomination. But, if these same deists will take away the foundation of my hope, and revile the Saviour in whom is all my trust, if they will deride that word which is spirit and life to my soul, no man can expect that I shall account them my familiar friends, or choose them for my social companions. Christian love will never require this of me or any of its possessors. Indeed, Doctor, you were wrong to resent the discipline which the Rev. Mr. Venn so freely bestowed upon you, notwithstanding it might appear to a gentleman of your sensibility to be something too warm, seeing that, on this head, you certainly gave him room for some suspicion. Though, for my own part, I dissent from his judgment concerning you, and do not believe you to be a deist, nor a pagan, nor an atheist, but a mere Rational Dissenter, unestablished in any set of sentiments for or against Christianity, which the incoherence and indigestedness of your religious writings plainly testify. Moreover, I have conceived such a high opinion of your uprightness, that I expect, as soon as you become actually a deist, to see a defence of the rational system of deism published by Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S.

From whom the deists have received this undeserved ill usage, you have not been pleased to inform us: but I have a strong suspicion that it must have been from the unmannerly Orthodox, seeing the deists and Rational Dissenters are upon terms so friendly and sociable. However, I am perfectly agreed with you in this, that it is more becoming the Christian, whatever the desert of the deists may be, to set down seriously, and consider their objections, than to treat them with contempt and insolence.

I now depart from the tents of deism a little, to converse

with the Rational Dissenters; a name both new and significant. I pray you, Doctor, who gave you this name? and for what was it bestowed upon your people? You say, indeed, that it is by way of distinction: but I would know from whom it can distinguish you, except from such as are deemed irrational among the Dissenters? Will the Rev. Dr. Priestley indeed affirm, upon the word of a honest man, that there are none who may be called rational among the Orthodox? Would not this be somewhat like self-conceit, and the spirit of the pharisee, who alone knows the law when all others are ignorant? When Orthodox is opposed to Rational, are we not under a necessity thereby to understand *irrational?* Then the distinction between dissenters will be, *Rational Dissenters* and *Irrational Dissenters.* Who are the Rational Dissenters but those who believe as your reverence does; and who the irrational but those who differ from you? Is this that humble spirit which you tell us Christianity inspires? It is indeed natural for a man to consider his own set of sentiments as the more eligible and consistent, and it is desirable to be established in them, and fully persuaded in his own mind; but it argues much of the pharisee to suppose that we are so infallibly right as to deem them who differ from us irrational. If you were acquainted with me, Doctor, you would say that I have a very sufficient stock of vanity; and yet I assure you, that I am not vain enough to suppose that every particular article of my creed is perfectly rational and consistent; however, when any one article is proved to me to be irrational and inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus, it hath no longer place in my confession.

To dismiss this head I shall produce an authority which will by no means countenance the assumption of that honourable appellation by any one sect of professors, to the disparagement of those of other persuasions. "We are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence." Dr. Priestley.

"All sects and parties agree in the great duties of the human life; they equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us." Dr. Priestley.

Now if we are all equally fallible, as you intimate, how comes it that one has a right to assume a name expressive of higher illumination than his fellows?

If all sects equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, let the Doctor tell me in what his sect is more rational than their neighbours? Indeed, sir, there is a vast resemblance of the pharisee here, and proof sufficient that you have not as yet attained a perfect conformity to your own excellent aphorisms.

I am amazed to find a gentleman of your high pretensions to distinguished reason giving such a confused account of the Redeemer's person; it is indeed a difficult matter to find out whether, what you call the Rational scheme, or that of the Orthodox, is most favoured in the hints referred to in your writings, which, it must be owned, establish neither. You tell us, "that our Lord took it for granted that his disciples would form themselves into such societies, and that those powers of admonition, censure, and excommunication, would be assumed and exercised."* This appears to me to be more injurious to the honour of Jesus, and more unfavourable to the divine institution of churches and church-discipline, than perhaps was designed by the writer. This *taking it merely for granted that they would form themselves*, &c. makes the constitution of churches to be no more than a voluntary act of men, without divine appointment, rather than an institution of the great prophet and head of the church. If we lose the idea of divine appointment in the formation and government of Gospel-churches, by what means can order and discipline be enforced? But we are informed that Jesus continued forty days with his disciples, after his resurrection, before he ascended to heaven, teaching them the things concerning the kingdom of God. That is, as I apprehend, concerning a Gospel-church state; and from the procedure of the disciples immediately after his ascension, in forming themselves into an orderly society, and establishing a code of discipline, it would seem that the former instructions and injunctions of their ascended Lord, were the only things which had led them to it. Allow me to say, that this part of the apostles' conduct, without an express command immediately from Jesus himself, or mediately by the Holy Ghost, as the spirit of Jesus, would have been equally impious with the kindling of strange fire on the altar, for which the sons of Aaron were slain by the

* Discipline, p. 121.

hand of the Omnipotent. A certain knowledge of the divine will was necessary in order to their entrance upon a church-establishment, and who is he that reveals this will unto us but the great "Teacher sent from God?" To talk therefore of his taking it for granted, is vague and inconsistent. Moreover, it is highly derogatory to his personal honour, and supposeth that he was not morally * certain that they would thus form themselves into a church state, only took it for granted; whereas the very passage you there refer to, "tell it to the church," evidently shews that his disciples had been instructed already in this part of their duty; and, if instructed, it must have been by him. This *taking it barely for granted*, leaving a doubt behind concerning the extent of the Redeemer's knowledge, very ill agrees with that memorable confession of Peter so unfavourable to your rational religion, "Lord, thou knowest all things;" all things past, present, or future; all things in heaven, earth, or hell; all things created and uncreated.† Whether it is safest for us to subscribe Peter's confession, "that Jesus even before his ascension knew all things," or Dr. Priestley's, which says "that Jesus is but a man like ourselves," and that he took it for granted his disciples would form themselves into such societies, &c. I shall leave my reader to determine. This favourite phrase, "That Jesus Christ is only a man like ourselves," you have been pleased frequently to introduce. I also rejoice that Jesus is a man like myself; but I dare not assert as you do, that he is only a man like myself, having both the Scriptures and Dr. Priestley's own testimony to evince the contrary; as I shall shew in its proper place.

There is a very remarkable passage in your Preliminary Discourse, p. 5, and which for its singularity I cannot well pass over without remark. "It was probably an attempt

* This distinction between taking a thing merely for granted and being morally certain of it, by some may be thought not to be sufficiently founded in fact; I shall offer in its defence a fact which may be depended upon. When I first read some of Dr. Priestley's philosophical works, I took it for granted that a mind so expanded as his could never descend to shew a mean resentment of the conduct of those who differ from him in matters of religion: but the issue has sufficiently shewn that I was very far from being morally certain that this was precisely the case.

† When things uncreated are spoken of, the author does not intend that things possible to have been created, or that may hereafter be created, should be understood, but the Creator himself in his revealed subsistences, and indescribable perfections of his nature. Believing firmly that God cannot be perfectly known but by God himself, and that Jesus being said to know all things is such a proof of his proper Deity, as all the enemies of that doctrine fight against as men who beat the air.

to connect Christianity with these *(pagan)* hypotheses that first suggested the idea of Jesus Christ having been a pre-existent, super-angelic spirit, the creator and governor of this world." It may be so, Doctor; but if it is, it will reflect but little honour upon the great apostle of the Gentiles, who evidently suggests the idea of Jesus Christ having been a pre-existent being by whom the world was made and supported, Col. i. 15—17. "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." Now, as I have no other way of knowing what a writer means but by attending closely to the manner in which he expresseth himself, I am obliged to abide by the obvious sense of the words he makes use of, which in this place and several others plainly suggest the idea of Christ's existence before his incarnation and being born of a virgin. And yet one would really think that this holy apostle had no view to accommodate Christianity to pagan systems of philosophy, seeing chap. ii. ver. 8. he strictly chargeth the Colossians to "beware lest any man should spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world, and not after Christ." He must have acted very deceitfully, and very inconsistently, if he was studying to reconcile Christianity with any pagan hypothesis whatever, when he so warmly cautions to guard against the effects of their vain philosophy; one would really be tempted to think that he dreaded nothing more than such an accommodation.

However, I am not certain whether your design in this place be to combat your friends the Arians, who indeed hold that Christ was such a pre-existent spirit as you speak of, or your old friends the Orthodox, who consider him as having eternally existed as the God of angels; only, from your known attachment to the latter, it is presumed that you will omit no opportunity of paying your compliments to them. As for the Arians, they are certainly nearer the truth, than their more rational brethren who assert that Jesus had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin; and as for the Orthodox, they are kept tolerably in

countenance by that declaration of Jesus himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." And however Dr. Priestley understands these words, it is plain the Jews, blind and irrational as they were, understood him, as, although not fifty years old, making himself older than their father Abraham, and so strongly expressive of his existence before his incarnation, that they thought he deserved death for such a declaration. Notwithstanding, Doctor, to give you your due, you have greatly confirmed the Orthodox in their sentiments before you finish that ridiculous paragraph. But more of this hereafter.

Page 7 of the same Discourse yields us an instance of singular rationality, in placing the worship of Jesus Christ on a level with the worship of dead men, and as extinguishing the true idea of the divine character and government. "When the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, as well as that of Jesus Christ, was introduced, the true idea of the divine character and government was wholly lost." That the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, is comparatively of a late date, and that the introduction of such idolatry into the Christian church, naturally tended to efface the true idea of the divine character and government, will not be denied by the Orthodox: but it must require sagacity not inferior to yours, to find out a likeness between this idolatry and the worship of Jesus Christ. Must we indeed account the worship of the Son of God equally idolatrous with that of Thomas à Becket, and other dead men among the papists? It occurs to my mind, however, that the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, is expressly against both the letter and spirit of Scripture; whereas the worship of Jesus Christ is as expressly enjoined in holy writ; it is therefore far from being a proof of the strictest accuracy in the Rev. Dr. Priestley in placing them, as in this sentence, on a level. I should be glad to know who these saints are that you speak of as the objects of worship, whether they are dead men, or living men, or indeed of the human species at all; for as you are pleased to distinguish them both from angels and dead men, I am not a little puzzled to find out who are intended, "When the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, as well as that of Jesus Christ, was introduced, the true idea

of the divine character and government was wholly lost." Really, Doctor! But are you serious? Does the beholding of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace, deprive us of the true idea of the Father himself? One would really think that there is no method so likely for us to come at the true idea of the Father, the end, as beholding him through his Son, the way which leads to him. We, for our parts, know no other way of coming to the Father, but by Jesus Christ, though it seems that Dr. Priestley and the rest of the Rationals have got a nearer way. Nevertheless, I will not affirm that you and your friends worship dead men any more than we do; but I have known some Rational Dissenters as well as Orthodox ere now very remarkable for their devotion to living men; which is pretty near as preposterous as the other worship. I wish you would tell me, Doctor, when it was that the worship of Jesus Christ was introduced; for I find it to have been of long standing, very current in the days of the apostles, practised by many in the days of his own flesh, and always acceptable when the worshipper came to him in a right spirit. Indeed there is one instance of his putting a check upon a certain worshipper, who came to him under mistaken views of his person: he was a rational, polite Jewish gentleman, virtuous and pious in his own way; one who considered Jesus to be only a man like himself; yet as a teacher sent from God, to reform the people, and point out the path of duty to them. Coming to Jesus with great swelling words of respect in his mouth, such words as were applicable to none who had not a personal claim to proper Deity; the divine teacher put him in mind, that, if he entertained such low notions of his person, his eulogy was absurd, seeing God alone is essentially good. Some people there are who suppose that the worship of the Rational Dissenters is near a-kin to this, and are very apprehensive that it will meet with the same acceptance.

Dear sir, what indignation must have filled your breast, had your reverence stood by when Thomas the apostle worshipped and adored Jesus as "his Lord and his God!" And how would you have blamed Jesus, "who you say is only a man like yourself," for receiving this high adoration which could not be due to him in your view of things?

Two things appear to me to be very remarkable in this instance of the worship of Jesus Christ.

1. Thomas acted just as if he had been an Orthodox Dissenter, in "worshipping Christ as Lord and God," who Dr. Priestley tells us, "is but a man like ourselves."

2. Jesus suffered Thomas to continue in his absurdity and error, without attempting to convince him of them; yea, such was his conduct, as tended to make Thomas believe that this adoration was cordially accepted. However, sir, had you been there, I doubt not but you would even have done as your betters, the Jewish rabbies, had often done before; reproved both the Lord and his servant. Two things apparently rise from these considerations.

1. That Thomas the apostle was not what you call a Rational Dissenter any more than myself.

2. That the worship of Jesus Christ was very early introduced, and that, of course, according to your notion, the true idea of the divine character and government was wholly lost in the days of Christ and his apostles.

I cannot help thinking, by the way, that what time soever the worship of Jesus Christ was introduced, and how erroneous soever it may appear in the eye of a Rational Dissenter, if an error, it is an error divinely instituted. I sincerely beg that you would favour me with an exposition of Heb. i. 6. "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him." And also John v. 23:—"That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

By the first-begotten in the one text, I apprehend he who is called the Son in the other is intended. If so, it is clear to a demonstration, that he is to be honoured by all the angels of God, and by all the descendants of Adam; and as for the nature of that worship or honour that is to be given to him, we are told that it is such as we ought to pay to the Father. In order to deter us from undervaluing him as a man, by considering him as being such a one as ourselves, and to excite us to honour him even as we honour the Father; we are told that the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, and that the Father accepteth of no honour but where the Son is included;

"He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him." Now, sir, if all the angels of God are commanded to worship the first-begotten, and if all men ought to honour the Son even as they honour the Father, must not the Rational Dissenters be very absurd and impious in considering him as only a man like themselves? If all judgment is committed unto the Son, will there not be some danger, think you, of his resenting the conduct of those who undervalue him even as a man, let their pretensions to superior reason be ever so lofty?

I suppose you will think, sir, that there is orthodoxy sufficient in what I have already written in this letter to make the exercise of reading it at one sitting abundantly severe; I shall therefore conclude for this time, subscribing myself,

Reverend Sir,
Your humble Servant.

LETTER V.

Indeed Doctor! Is it so, that the Rational Dissenters are apt to undervalue Jesus Christ even as a man? and is this the Rational Christianity that boasts its own excellency above all that is called Orthodox? I verily think, indeed, that having got the only-begotten of the Father, brought down to a level with themselves, they might, in point of good manners, have used him with common decency, and not have undervalued him as you tell us has been their practice. With me this is no proof of their superlative reason, I assure you. Do not you think, sir, in this, that they follow the example of Jews and Mahomedans, who also undervalue him as a man, and who also are virtuous and rational in their own way? One would really be tempted to think, that the people with whom you are conversant, are remarkable for nothing so much, as their dissenting from Jesus Christ as an object of divine adoration. Either you greatly belie them, Doctor, or they must be the most impious and irrational race of beings on this side of the Hellespont.

"Upon finding, that, instead of being very God of very God, the Creator of heaven and earth, he is only a man like ourselves, we are apt at first to undervalue him, and

not to consider him in that distinguished light, in which though a man he is everywhere represented."* By which it appears that the first impression your rational religion makes upon your minds is, to influence you to undervalue the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of worshipping him, even as you worship the Father. Some would be apt to conclude from hence, that rational religion has very few advantages over scriptural religion, which influences us to embrace and adore the Lord Jesus Christ according to the import of his great name Immanuel. If your Rational Dissenters undervalue the Lord Jesus with impunity, do you think, Doctor, that we shall be damned for rejoicing in him as the seed of David after the flesh, and at the same time adoring him as God over all, blessed for evermore? If we should indeed be so unhappy, we shall have cause to execrate the names of those prophets and apostles who have by their doctrines so grievously misled us. But if it should in the end appear that the Redeemer's person is answerable to his adorable name Immanuel, think seriously, sir, how they will be likely to fare who undervalue him, even as a man? Will it not be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such? Although they lift themselves up to heaven in pride and self-conceit, will they not be in danger of being cast down into hell, in a way of just condemnation for their having undervalued him, whom the Father delighteth to honour, and whom he hath commanded all men to worship, even as they worship himself? These things deserve a very serious consideration, Doctor: may you and I both consider them aright!

By the way, it is pretty plain, and I am glad to see it, that so illustrious is this truth of Christ's proper and personal Deity, that God draweth testimonies to it from the mouths and pens, even of those who are its most avowed enemies. Pagans, ere now, have borne testimony to the mission of Jesus; and the hardened Jewish high-priest bore witness to the redemption of mankind. I am persuaded it would appear something remarkable if we should find the Rev. Dr. Priestley like the Jewish high-priest, unknown to himself, testifying the true and proper Deity of the Son of God; yet even this is far from being impos-

* Prel. Disc. p. 31.

sible. Give me leave, sir, to try what may be done in this way: for really I think it not only practicable but easy.

1. After correcting that irreverence of your friends towards the Lord Jesus Christ, which the first impressions of rational religion are apt to influence them to, you are pleased to set before them a sketch of what you take to be the dignity of his person, amongst which, I find it declared of Jesus, "that he has communications with God, and speaks and acts from God in such a manner, as no other man ever did."* You know, sir, that the patriarchs and prophets, especially the latter, had communications with God so far, as to know and reveal his mind to mankind; what they spake and acted from God, was perfectly right, and acceptable in his sight, insomuch that their doctrine is to this day as authentic as the doctrine of Christ himself. You say that Jesus has communications with God which they never had, which seems to imply a special union between God and him, such as they never enjoyed, nor pretended to. As to the precise definition of this union, he must be precipitate who dares undertake it; but that there is some such indescribable union subsists, your own doctrine apparently supposes. I really believe that we should have had comparatively but few objectors to the proper Deity of the blessed Saviour, could our divines have considered the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ, as a thing to us incomprehensible, and left it just as it is found in the Scriptures, without darkening and perplexing the subject with their own bewildering and bold attempts to explain it. I am really glad to see that after all your militating against the true and proper Deity of Christ, you cannot help supposing that he enjoys such a union with God as none other can enjoy. According to the stated laws of philosophy, there can be no communication without union; dissolve the union, and communication instantly ceases. The communication which you say Jesus has with God, necessarily supposes a union of Christ's humanity with true and proper Deity, such as is enjoyed by no other being whatever.

2. Speaking of Jesus Christ as head over all things to his church, you have these very remarkable words: "who still feels for, and will be present with his faithful disciples and

* Prelim. Disc. p. 31.

followers, even to the end of the world."* Nothing can be more expressive of my sentiments than this declaration; nothing can less countenance the vain and ignorant notion of the Rational Dissenters, "that Christ is only a man like ourselves." Yea, nothing can more fully prove the true and proper divinity of the Son of God than this testimony from Dr. Priestley. Indeed, Sir, you must give me leave to be thankful that the most holy God has by your pen confirmed me more and more in that, without which my hope must inevitably be cut off.

Give yourself a little time to reflect, and ask your own heart how it is that one who is only a man like ourselves can feel for his faithful disciples in general, and be with them in all their trials; seeing he is removed, as such, from them to a distance immense and unspeakable? A man like ourselves must be capable of being only in one place, at one and the same period. You and I cannot be both at Leeds and in London at the same time; neither can Jesus, if only like ourselves, be at once both on earth and in heaven. That he is in heaven, and there must remain as man, till his second coming, the apostle Paul bears witness; it will therefore lie upon Dr. Priestley to shew, how he can be present with his people in all their trials, even to the end of the world. If Jesus continues in heaven till the restitution of all things, as Paul says, and yet be with his people in all their trials, as Dr. Priestley says, and according to his own promise, he must be something more than a man like ourselves.

You know, sir, that the faithful disciples and followers of Jesus may be exceedingly dispersed in the world, and that therefore the person who is present with them in all places and upon all occasions must needs be very extraordinary. For instance, they are scattered through Britain, and on the continent; in the Indies east and west, in every quarter of the globe: therefore, how shall the man Jesus be present with them all, in all places, at one and the same time, without a presence universally diffusive? indeed, sir, it will never impeach your wisdom, either as a Christian or a Dissenter, to believe that the being, who is present with all the heavenly hosts, and at the same time is present with all his people upon earth, in what quarter soever, must be

* Preliminary Discourse, p. 25.

truly and properly God. I cannot tell how you will speak of the omnipresence of God, when you speak thus of the presence of Christ, who you say is only a man. Really, sir, I know nobody who can answer your writings to better purpose than yourself. I blame both Mr. Venn and the Protestant Dissenter for not giving you the honour so justly merited.

3. It might well be thought an unpardonable neglect, if I were to take no farther notice of that wonderful passage in page 6 of the Preliminary Discourse. "Having got this hypothesis (namely, that Christ was a pre-existent being), they were easily led into a mistaken interpretation of some passages of the Old Testament, and supposed, that when God is there said to have created the world by his Word (λογος), another agent was meant, and not the mere power and energy of God himself: though the apostle John seems to have intended expressly to contradict and refute that notion, by asserting, in the introduction to his Gospel, that what is called λογος or the Word, was God himself, and not a being distinct from him." How far some texts in the Old Testament have been understood or misunderstood, is not the object of my present inquiry; though it is observable enough, that the inspired apostle Paul, as well as his brethren, sets forth the existence of Jesus antecedent to his incarnation. All that I aim to take notice of here is, the assertion of John, that "what is called the Word is God himself." It is what I by no means deny, though I cannot help wondering to see the text cited by one who takes Jesus to be only a man like ourselves. Surely no man was ever more mistaken as to the meaning of a text of Scripture, than you are with regard to this, nor less apprehensive of the just consequences of such an injudicious quotation, This text you have cited with a view to prove that Jesus Christ had no existence prior to his coming in the flesh; but, to the entire overthrow of the Rational scheme, it establishes as a rock, the doctrine of the true and proper Deity of Jesus Jehovah. Admitting that there was no super-angelic spirit employed in the work of creation and providence, but that God himself, by his own proper energy, brought all things into being, and by the same energetic influence supports all things, and that what is called the Word is God himself, and not a being distinct

from him, what advantage will this be to the Rational scheme, seeing the same who is called the Word, and whom you say from John is God himself, is as expressly said to have been made flesh and to have dwelt amongst us? To set the matter in a clear point of view, it will be proper to recite the passage, chap. i ver 1—3. 14. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." I beg leave to present you with a paraphrase on the words, according to your sense of them; and then we shall see how far they will support your account of Jesus Christ, as being only a man like yourself.

"In the beginning was God, and God was with God, and God was God himself, the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And God was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Now, Doctor, this is the fair reading of the words according to your notion; and, had not you told us that you are a Rational Christian, any body would have taken you for one of the worst kind of Athanasians, if not a downright Tritheist. But, it is not my purpose at present to bring farther proof upon this head; contenting myself with your own authority for my believing in the proper Deity of my blessed Redeemer.

The Word was God himself, say you, and so says John the Evangelist; who farther says, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," &c. That is, God himself was made flesh and dwelt among us. Now, sir, I should like to know when or how God himself was made flesh and dwelt among us, if he was not manifested in the adorable person of Jesus of Nazareth? I think, indeed, that history furnisheth not with any account of human nature since the fall of Adam, so fit as was his for Deity to inhabit. You help me to account for some passages of holy writ which Rational Christians seldom meddle with, such as, "In Jesus dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;"

which must be the case, you know, if the Word is God himself, and that God himself was made flesh. "His name shall be called Immanuel, which is, God with us." Literally fulfilled when God himself was made flesh, and dwelt among us in our own very nature. This was God manifest in the flesh, whom the apostle Paul speaks of, and which he calls the great mystery of godliness. In this view of the subject, Jesus is justified when, in the Apocalypse, he assumes the name of Alpha and Omega, which assumption could never be justified on supposition that he had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin.

Indeed, Doctor, those people whom you style Orthodox are more obliged to you than you were aware of, and henceforward will be apt to expect advantages to their system from your pen, either designedly or undesignedly.

However, I would not have you or any body else suppose that I have entered here into a defence of Christ's proper divinity; that was by no means my view. All I aimed at was to point out to my reader how far you yourself have defended it, even when you fancied yourself to be writing against it; no judgment therefore is to be formed, by what is here written, of my sentiments concerning the person of Jesus, any farther than, that I am a hearty advocate for his real divinity: an article of faith which I should be glad to discuss with the Reverend Doctor Priestley, or any of his friends, who may happen to be at leisure.

Upon the whole, sir, I could almost persuade myself, if it were possible, that it is not the doctrine of Christ's divinity itself that vexes you, so much as the people who maintain it; and perhaps you may have reasons for your prejudice against them, which I am unacquainted with: but really, it does not become a generous mind to retain prejudice against any of our fellow-creatures. I intend not any thing upon this subject at present farther than assuring you, that I think the rational scheme will require a much better and more consistent defence respecting Christ's being only a man like ourselves, before it will be likely to gain many proselytes out of the Orthodox tribes.

I am, Reverend Sir,
Your humble Servant.

LETTER VI.

REVEREND SIR,

It is far from my design to misrepresent your meaning, or to make use of unworthy cavils, in order to render you odious to your fellow-Christians: neither would I willingly err in the least, in point of fairness, as you think your other antagonists have done; but you must give me leave to say, that you have written many things without any meaning at all, unless indeed you intended to vindicate the doctrine of atonement so long exploded by Rational Christians. That the latter was the case, will not easily be believed; and therefore I shall admit the former, and shall shew from good and authentic records, that it is even possible for a Rational man to write without any meaning. "When the mind has been tinctured," says my author,* "with any false notions of God, it is hardly possible that they should ever be practically rectified; because the same names will continue to suggest the same ideas, and to excite the same feelings, whatever reason may dictate to the contrary." I think it is pretty plain that those many, who, you say, talk of God like Arminius or Socinus, and think of him much like Austin and Calvin, can have no meaning in what they say, seeing their words are a contradiction to the dictates of reason within them. Dr. Priestley also informs us, that formerly he had his mind tinctured with those unworthy notions of God, commonly called Orthodoxy; therefore it is impossible that they should ever be practically rectified. This may serve as an apology with the Rational Dissenters for the many Orthodox sayings gleanable in the extensive fields of his productions, of which it may be said that they spring up in as little time as mushrooms; whether those of them that are upon divine subjects are likely to be of longer duration, I cannot certainly determine. However, the dictates of the Doctor's reason being diametrically opposite to every sentiment of Orthodoxy; it follows, reader, that wherever you meet with an Orthodox sentence in Dr. Priestley's works, you need not be offended with it, for it is only the influence

* Preliminary Discourse, p. 19.

which the former tincture of his mind has upon him, and in reality the author meant nothing by it.

It is indeed my opinion, that many of your sayings respecting the sufferings of Christ are very orthodox, and some of them even strictly Calvinistic. Surely it will be the wonder of the age if you should at last come over to the Calvinists. Really, Doctor, I do not despair of your conversion; for I think it not impossible, notwithstanding all that the Rev. Mr. Venn and the Protestant Dissenter have pleaded to the contrary. Should I prove you a Calvinist, and expose you to the persecutions of your Rational brethren, what would you say, sir? Would you not allow me to have some pretensions to reason myself, although numbered even amongst the Orthodox?

But, before I proceed farther upon this head, give me leave to observe, that I am as great an enemy as you can be, to the burning of bodies for heresy; that is, putting people to death for the glory of God, and the good of the church: and have the murder of Servetus in equal abhorrence with yourself, notwithstanding Calvin was therein an accomplice. Nevertheless, when I consider that all the enemies of Calvin's doctrine, who have written from Bellarmine down to Dr. Priestley, have carefully recorded this instance, and industriously held him up to public infamy for it, it convinces me that Mr. Calvin must have been a man of the most irreproachable conduct and spirit in every other part of his life, seeing his avowed enemies have been able to find nothing else against him but that infamous act, of his consenting to the death of mistaken Servetus, so that the very reproaches of his enemies serve only to embellish his character and to advance his reputation. I am not certain whether Dr. Priestley would give his consent to the burning of Orthodox Dissenters at a stake for their bigotry; but, if we may give credit to his own testimony, he is very willing that they should burn in hell-fire for their orthodoxy; for he is fully persuaded, that Jesus Christ will do by them, just as he did by the Pharisees in his time; the children of the kingdom, who were cast into utter darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. After such an expression of your charity, really, sir, your censure of John Calvin hath not the most favourable appearance. Most people will be apt

to conclude, that your spirit possesseth a degree of rancour, at least not inferior to that spirit which persecuted Michael Servetus; but it is well for the Orthodox Dissenters that there is a great difference between Calvin's influence and that of the Rev. Dr. Priestley. I might indeed ask you if those who are now called Orthodox are the only people who have had the honour of burning heretics, and whether the Arians themselves, in the days of their Orthodoxy, did not see the same necessity of glorifying God by destroying those who differed from them. Indeed, sir, there are few sects among us who have not a lawful claim to the honour of having murdered their brethren for the good of the cause: and I am very much mistaken, if, even in our own days, we could not be furnished with divines who would very willingly take this method of reclaiming the refractory, were they but blessed with a government favourable for such a purpose.

But, leaving the shocking scenes of pious murder, I shall give due attention to your doctrine of atonement, as I find it scattered in your prolific pages: and I rejoice to see it forcing its evidence through the labours of the most strenuous opposition, and making even Dr. Priestley himself act in subservience to the great designs of truth. The first passage I shall quote relates to the mission of Jesus, shews to what end he was sent into the world, and is found page 20 of your Considerations of Differences of Opinion. "A sense of our obligation to our Lord Jesus Christ, also, as a person commissioned from God to redeem, that is, to deliver, save, or rescue us from a state of sin and misery." Now, sir, whatever meaning you had, or whether you really have any meaning at all in these words, you must not be offended if I take the sentence according to its grammatical construction, and apply it to the purpose in view. The phraseology is truly Calvinistic, and Calvin himself could not better have expressed his own meaning than you do, even when you are labouring to root out Calvinism from the face of the earth. I am afraid, Doctor, that the Rational Dissenters will compare you to David Simple's brown cow, which having given a good pailful of milk, kicked it down with her foot. It is true you have laboured to soften that inflexible word *redeem;* but in fact it will appear that your explanation has but very little promoted

the interests of rational religion; has really befriended what you call Orthodoxy, and not overturned it as you humbly expected.

"To redeem us from a state of sin and misery," is the text; "To deliver, save, or rescue us, from a state of sin and misery," is your commentary upon it. Give me leave to comment on your commentary, before I meddle with the text. And I assure you, I do not illustrate it by my own authority only, but bring along with me the authority of Samuel Johnson, A.M. in his almost unliftable Dictionary, whose testimony as a dictionary-maker is generally held to be good and authentic. He tells me, that to deliver, is to save or rescue, so that we have here no less than three words given in order to make clear the sense of one. Would not these three words, heaped thus together, seem to convey the idea of some great and imminent danger to which the parties, thus to be delivered, saved, or rescued, stood exposed? Also, does not the idea of something very great and hazardous in the undertaking of him who was thus commissioned to deliver, save, or rescue, suggest itself from them. In order to deliver, save, or rescue, us from a state of sin and misery, must not what he did who was thus commissioned, be in some way or other accounted to us, and rendered available by some kind of application. But ought we not, in explaining a word or sentence, to come up as near as we possibly can to its real sense, if we are not fully able to express it? This you avoided in the present case; notwithstanding your gloss upon the word (redeem) expresses much more than is favourable to the rational scheme. Permit me to review the word redeem in its common acceptation, and consider the Saviour's commission accordingly; and that I may thereby teach you either to become Orthodox yourself, or leave our phrases to our own proper use.

1. To redeem. To ransom; to relieve by paying a price.

2. To redeem. To make atonement.

3. To redeem. To save the world from the curse due to sin.

4. To redeem. To rescue, to recover.

You tell us that Jesus was commissioned by God to redeem us; we see that to redeem, was to ransom us, by

paying the price of our redemption. What that price was, by which he ransomed us, you are pleased to shew in these precious words, "who loved us, and freely gave himself to death for us."* So that if we admit Dr. Priestley to be his own expositor, the doctrine will be thus defined: Jesus Christ is a person commissioned of God to ransom us, by giving himself to death as the price of our redemption. This is sound divinity, sir; good Orthodox Calvinism. If some certain gentlemen, now dwelling in the house appointed for all living, were to lift up their heads from under the turf and review your writings, they would undoubtedly blame you for betraying the cause of Rational religion, by inadvertently blending your writings with so many Orthodox phrases, provided they have not departed from their former sentiments. But to the matter in hand; you tell us that Jesus Christ is a person commissioned by God to redeem us. To redeem us is to make an atonement for us. Paul, the apostle, tells us, that this was made by the sacrifice of himself, whereby he for ever perfected all who are sanctified, which is confirmed by your assertion that he loved us and gave himself to death for us. Giving himself to death for us was certainly what the apostle meant by the sacrifice of himself. Sacrifices were ordained to make an atonement for sin; the Redeemer therefore gave himself as a sacrifice for us, that he might atone for the sin which we had committed, as you very justly observe, by putting the following words into Christ's mouth, alluding to the legal sacrifices, page 2 of your Additional Remarks, &c. "My blood may be said to be shed for the remission of sins," which must be, because it is atoning blood, and hath procured this remission or pardon. Good Calvinism again, sir. You tell us that Christ was commissioned of God to redeem us, "we find that this redemption is said to be, to deliver the world from the curse due to sin;" and if we want to know how this was done, the apostle tells us that he "delivered us from the law by being made a curse for us." Here was the innocent becoming a curse for the guilty; a doctrine which your reason strongly remonstrates against, but which your pen very agreeably establishes, Doctor. It was certainly very unhappy for Rational religion that your mind was so strongly tinctured

* Prel. Disc. p. 24.

with Orthodoxy in your younger days; for, as you justly observe, it is impossible that ever it should be practically rectified. Mortal man could hardly do more to rectify it than you have done; and yet, in spite of yourself, Orthodoxy will break out in your compositions.

To redeem, is to rescue or recover, as you say, which is very expressive of the work of the Redeemer upon the redeemed: by his bringing us out of darkness into marvellous light, and from the power of Satan to the living God. Well may we then, as you advise us, "entertain in our minds a very high idea of the benefits accruing to us by his life and death;"* good experimental divinity indeed! divinity worthy your most serious consideration. This is the very thing that the Independents require in order to communion with them; and which you say there is not a shadow of ground for in the New Testament. Whether there is the shadow of ground for it in the New Testament† or not, I have shewn that there is the substance of ground for it in Dr. Priestley's own writings.

Give me leave to correct a small inaccuracy in that otherwise beautiful passage of yours, "who loved us, and freely gave himself to death for us, to redeem us from sin and misery; that we might become partakers of the same love of God with him; and be joint heirs of the same glory and happiness;"‡ notwithstanding you consider the Son of God to be only a man like yourself; yet even as a man like yourself, you ought to have treated him with common civility, and not have given him the lie, as in the passage under consideration. Christ himself tells us, "that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."§ Here the love of God is represented as sovereign, and spontaneous, the sole cause of the gift of Christ. This you deny, and allege that the gift of Christ is the cause why we are beloved of God. "He gave himself, that we might become partakers of the love of God," say you; supposing that the world of mankind were not partakers of the love of God, till Christ had given himself to redeem us and procure this love for us. Do not, Doctor, be offended at those who talk of purchased pardon,

* Considerations on the Lord's Supper, p. 57. † Address on Church Discipline, p. 34.
‡ Prel. Disc. p. 24. § John iii. 16.

seeing, according to the obvious sense of your own words, the very love itself which pardons the sinner, is purchased or procured by the death of Jesus. But the truth is, the love which God bore to mankind was the cause of Christ's being at all given; the end to which Christ was given, was, that as many as believe in him should be brought to possess the blessings of this loving-kindness.

In your first query to the Protestant Dissenter, you twice mention, in the very language of Calvinism, "what Christ has done and suffered for us." How could what he did, be done for us if it was not done in our stead? Or how could he with any propriety be said to have suffered for us, if the pain which he endured was not the proper punishment of our sin and rebellion? He could neither do nor suffer for us, without standing in our place; if he did so, then he was the sinner's substitute to all intents and purposes. How can you then, sir, consistent with yourself, blame those who believe that the innocent Jesus died for guilty man? This Calvinistical doctrine of vicarious punishment you thus set forth in page 30 of Additional Consideration, &c. "When we do any thing in remembrance of Christ, we do it to take occasion to recollect what Christ has done and suffered *for us* in order to accomplish the gracious scheme of our salvation, or our deliverance from sin and misery. Our Lord also calls the bread his body, and the wine his blood, apparently with a view to our recollecting, in a more especial manner, the last and most perfect instance of his love, in giving his body to be crucified, and his blood to be shed *for us*." Again, in page 32, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, appears to me to have been added, in order to express on what account we are to remember him, viz. as having by his death accomplished the scheme of our salvation." Very pretty divinity indeed! passable enough, even with the Orthodox: all tending to set forth the plenary satisfaction made by Christ for the sins of those who shall believe in him.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VII.

REVEREND SIR,

As you have been pleased to signify the high and good opinion which you have conceived of your own attainments in your letter to Mr. Venn, p. 79, where you tell us that, "Having experienced an almost entire revolution in your own religious sentiments, you find your heart better, and your head clearer in consequence of it," &c. I should have expected that the doctrine of election and reprobation would have had no countenance in your performances. It is but just to believe that you would not willingly promote a doctrine, which your clear reason so strongly remonstrates against, any more than the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, A. M. sometime fellow of Lincoln-college, Oxford; who, in the depth of his humility and self-diffidence, is pleased to style that same doctrine "The horrible decree." It would seem that this reverend gentleman in the younger part of life had made an excursion down to hell, like the heroes of ancient fable, where he had an opportunity of hearing the cries of the damned, and of being informed by them of the horribleness of this decree; which account he thought proper to communicate to the world as soon as he got safe upon earth again. This performance was an unsacred hymn upon the horrible decree. Yet, after all the clearness of his head, he has been unable to restrain himself in his future publications from giving many bold strokes in favour of this same decree of election; for the Rev. Mr. Wesley has not yet learned to be *perfectly* consistent with himself, any more than Dr. Priestley and myself. Were I to study to put you out of conceit with the goodness of your heart, sir, I should very likely have little thanks for my trouble; but if Solomon were here, he would tell you that the man who trusts in his own heart is a fool. And really, Doctor, you have not given the Orthodox Dissenters any proof of its superlative goodness. Give me leave to tell you, that I am of opinion there is a great deal of room for your heart to grow better and your head to grow clearer still, on supposition that any thing can be gathered of the state of either, by your lucubrations. Between you and I, it is not thought very advisable to put too much

trust in the heart of man, or to lean much to human understanding. Some people will not scruple to allege that "the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, even beyond the knowledge of its owner." This they will assign as a reason why some flatter themselves that "they are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, even when they are wretched, miserable, blind, and naked." Indeed, sir, as you say of the Orthodox Dissenters, I may say to you; it would have been more eligible, and abundantly more for your honour, to have left it to me to publish the goodness of your heart, and the clearness of your head, than to have taken that trouble upon yourself, which must needs have been very mortifying to such modesty as yours. However, it is pretty plain, that the fruits of your conversion to the Rational scheme have not been so conspicuous to others as to yourself; as nothing but their want of discernment could have put you under the disagreeable necessity of sounding your own praise, in imitation of the Pharisees and their descendants.

I hope, sir, that your goodness will pardon the unhappy way that I have got of departing on a sudden from the subject proposed, and bear with my freedom while I inquire after the meaning of that passage, page 4, of your Essay on Church Discipline, "The general promulgation of the Gospel of Christ was intended to procure him, from all nations promiscuously, a peculiar people zealous of good works." I take it to be the very language of the Orthodox, and what the strictest Calvinist will by no means object to. When you assert that the promulgation of the Gospel was intended to answer this important purpose, I would suppose you mean, that it was intended by God himself. Might not I ask you if you do not think an intention in the infinite mind, in all respects equivalent to a decree? seeing he is of one mind and none can turn him, nor render abortive his grand designs. It will then appear that God had decreed that Christ should have a peculiar people zealous of good works, to be gathered by the preaching of the Gospel out from all nations promiscuously. This you can have no objection to, and for my part I have none, therefore so far we are agreed. This decree or intention of the Most High being admitted, it follows that the people to be procured

are said to be a peculiar people; as such, it behoves us to inquire into their character. On inquiry we shall find that this peculiar people are such whom the Redeemer appropriates to himself as his own special property, upon whom no other power whatever has any just or lawful claim, and with whom he deals as he does not with the world, or the nations from whom you say they are procured by the Gospel. These I take to be the people whom the apostle calls the fulness and body of Christ. So then it is apparent from your doctrine that the Most High intended that Christ should have a people appropriated to himself, and this people to be procured to him *from* the nations of the whole world. This procuring of a people for himself *from* all nations promiscuously, naturally supposeth that the nations themselves from which they are procured, are not intended to be Christ's peculiar people, therefore not procured by the promulgation of the Gospel. Very good Calvinism! Good old Orthodox doctrine, neighbour!

I am not rightly satisfied, Doctor, with your free manner of talking about what you call experience, while you blame others for the very same thing. You tell us that you have experienced an almost entire revolution of your religious sentiments. Pray, sir, why may not they have experienced the same? Have not they an equal right with yourself to embrace the truth upon conviction? You say that you have experienced your head to be got clearer, and your heart better upon this experimental revolution of your religious sentiments; and as the Orthodox, especially the Independents, have embraced a set of sentiments diametrically opposite to yours, why should you be affronted at them because they experience the very reverse of your feelings, and instead of their heads becoming clearer and their hearts better by the revolution in their religious sentiments, they become daily more acquainted with the deceitfulness of their hearts and the insufficiency of their heads. You know, sir, that our leading principle is, that every set of religious sentiments must produce effects upon the mind suitable to itself. You cannot therefore expect, Doctor, that your set of religious sentiments and mine can produce the very same effects upon the mind, seeing they are as opposite as light and darkness. But let my set of religious sentiments produce what effects it may, my experience of these

sentiments and their effects must be as real as your own; and I may be as sensible of the badness and sinfulness of my heart, as you are of the virtue and goodness of yours. Besides, you take the liberty to publish your experience to the whole world, if they will take the trouble of reading it; and why may not a member of an Independent church publish his experience to the community he intends to associate with? Indeed, Doctor, it is neither very generous nor rational to deny your neighbours the same liberty which you are pleased to take to yourself.

Moreover, you tell us that "the Independents require also such an account of what they call experience in religion as there is not a shadow of ground for in the New Testament, and which few but enthusiasts will pretend to do." You are by far too dogmatical, Doctor, you must strive to break yourself of that impolite positive way of speaking you have got; unless you intend to make the world believe that you are not as yet perfectly purged from self-conceit. Who these enthusiasts are, and what their pretensions be, I am not a competent judge: but according to my way of thinking, no man can have a juster title to that distinction, than the gentleman who, having undergone an entire revolution in his religious sentiments, finds his heart better and his head clearer upon the change, which you tell us has been your blessed experience.

In your Additional Observations on the Lord's Supper, page 36, you appeal "to the experience of the most sincere Christian, if he has not found every devotional feeling as lively in the exercise of prayer, as in the act, or in consequence of receiving the Lord's supper." I really believe they have, Doctor; every whit as lively. But what amazes me is, to find a writer who exclaims against those who talk of experience in religion as enthusiasts, should himself talk of "experience and devotional feelings," as if the Rational Dissenters had obtained the exclusive right of all devotional feelings to themselves. What some people call experience, and others call enthusiasm, can hardly be better expressed than by your phrase, "devotional feelings." To represent this important subject in a stronger light, let us suppose for instance that the Rev. Dr. Priestley approaches God in prayer, under a lively sense of the vast revolution he has undergone in his religious sentiments, and of the goodness

of his heart and clearness of his head consequent upon it; would not every devotional feeling exert itself in thankfulness to God, that he is not absurd like the Orthodox Dissenters, bigoted and angry like the Rev. Mr. Venn; unjust and unfair like the Protestant Dissenters, and ignorant and weak like myself. This, you know, sir, must be felt and experienced by you in a rational way, and why may not the people, whom you call Orthodox, *i. e.* irrational, have devotional feelings and experience in their own way, though different from yours? I cannot help thinking that the poor publican in the parable had as real and lively an experience of his own wretchedness and sin, as the gentleman Pharisee had of his devotional feelings, and of the goodness of his heart and clearness of his head. Each was experimental, in his own way; and the one had as good a right to lament his own sinfulness, as the other had to proclaim his personal goodness.

This brings to my mind a saying of yours, Additional Observations on the Lord's Supper, page 28. "If the righteous disclaim their good works at the day of judgment, can it be supposed that they will plead and proclaim them here?" Really, sir, I should think not; and that makes me the more surprised to hear from you any thing at all about the goodness of heart and the clearness of head which you have experienced. To make use of your own words, "It would be rather more decent for others to have persuaded you to think so well of yourself, than that you should first pay yourself that compliment."

I will inform you, Doctor, what kind of experiences the Independents require in order to admission into their communion, and then we shall see whether there be any shadow of ground for it or not in the New Testament. They require that the candidate for communion should experimentally know himself to be a lost, undone, and perishing sinner; one who stands in need of an all-sufficient and every way complete Saviour, to redeem him from the wrath to come, and to save him to the uttermost. That he should have such a sense of his own helplessness as to know that he can do nothing, unless God is pleased to work in him both to will and to do. That he believe in Jesus as the only, the all-sufficient Saviour of lost sinners, and desire to be found in him, washed in his blood and clothed with his

righteousness and salvation. Such and only such is the experience which Independent churches require, and which Dr. Priestley says has not a shadow of ground in the New Testament. You must have forgotten yourself strangely here, sir, on supposition that you have ever read the second of the Acts of the Apostles. The apostle preached the sufferings and death of Christ to the multitude; under his sermon the three thousand were pricked in their hearts with a sense of their sin and danger, as is apparent from their pathetic exclamation, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" Peter preached the Saviour of sinners to be believed in as the only way of life and salvation; they received the word gladly. It would seem that on believing in Jesus their sorrow was turned into joy; and all this was antecedent to their being admitted into the Christian church. This is rather more than a bare shadow of a ground for the experiences which you say the Independents require. Your words, page 118, on Discipline, are very applicable to those primitive Christians who were "taught wisdom and virtue by these their feelings and experience," for they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine without any revolution in their religious sentiments; in their fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayer, without losing all manner of church order and discipline, as the Rational Dissenters have done, according to your testimony. That same church at Jerusalem, I remember, would not receive the apostle Paul into their communion till they had an account of his experience, how far, and by what means he had learned Christ. Paul was no way backward to relate his experience on different occasions, and yet I do not recollect that, at any time by so doing he proclaimed his own goodness, however much the goodness of God was made manifest in him. Of all the people that ever heard this apostle preach, little was said by him about the goodness of his heart, or the clearness of his head; but he could talk very feelingly of the law in his members, which warred against the law in his mind; the flesh that lusted against the spirit; the body of death which was still upon him even after his conversion. I would advise you, Doctor, to make a close comparison between your experience and that of the apostle Paul, for his was certainly of the right kind, whatever yours

or mine may be; and it is a matter of no small importance whether we are right or wrong in this case, seeing death will cast the die and unalterably fix our state for ever in weal or woe unspeakable. I might refer you to Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, to Jairus, the jailor, and many others, whose experience was much akin to what the Independents require of those whom they choose to admit into their communion; but I think what has been said sufficient for the present, especially if you will consider it dispassionately and without prejudice.

One thing more I must take notice of before I conclude, and that is a very odd phrase of yours in page 36 of your Ess. on Disc. "It has pleased the Divine Being for good and obvious reasons not to make the terms of salvation so very determinate, as that a man shall be able to pronounce with absolute certainty concerning the future state of himself or others while we are in this life." The obvious intent of this is to insinuate, that the Independents take upon them to determine with absolute certainty on the eternal state of those whom they admit into communion; which just before you represent as a judging of the heart, and of a person's actual fitness for heaven. This misrepresentation of the conduct of the Independents must unavoidably bear somewhat hard against, either the goodness of your heart, or the clearness of your head; goodness of heart will not permit us wrongfully to accuse, but from certain causes we may have mistaken views of the conduct of our neighbours. However, our publication of those mistaken views will never be deemed by the public an incontestable proof of the deepest penetration and intelligence. A little to purge them from this scandal, give me leave to observe that you tell us, the Independents require an account of the experience of the candidate. This account which the candidate gives, is the subject of their examination, and upon it they determine whether or not it be consistent with the Scripture; but as to the sincerity of the person, and the reality of his experience, they pretend to be no farther judges of, than "what appears in the outward propriety and regularity of his behaviour." Will you upon cool reflection call this a taking upon them to determine with absolute certainty on the future state of the candidate? seeing

they do not even take upon them to determine on his present state, but on the profession which he makes, and of his conduct consequent upon it.

This passage also injuriously insinuates, that the Independents expect that candidates for communion should be able to determine upon their own future state, by being delivered from all doubts of their sincerity and fears of final miscarriage; which Dr. Priestley himself must needs know to be groundless, if he is in the least acquainted with Independent church-discipline. And one would suppose that he is perfectly informed in its nature, when he can so positively declare, that it is better to be without discipline altogether, than to embrace the discipline of the Independents, page 40.

"The *terms* of salvation are not so determinate," you say, &c. What! Doctor, is salvation to be sold, that we must talk of *terms?* I should have taken the terms to be sufficiently determinate, when the comprehensive blessing is expressly said to be without money and without price: yet if we must talk of buying and selling of salvation, let us keep to Bible language. But supposing that we must come up to terms in order to obtain salvation, are not those terms as yet determined? Not so determinate as to be the ground of a sure and certain hope of a blessed immortality for those who believe in Jesus in a Scripture sense? So then Rational religion supposeth, that the terms of salvation are as yet undetermined; and irrational or Scriptural religion supposeth, that he that believeth on the Son, hath life, and he that believeth not on the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Of these two commend me to the latter.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VIII.

REVEREND SIR,

I AM entirely of your opinion, that "Knowingly to conceal the truth, is a crime of so heinous a nature, that I should be very unwilling to impute it to any person whatever,"* and am ready to believe that you must have been

* Differences of Opinion, p. 9.

witness to a great deal of dissimulation, to the great grief of your own open and ingenuous spirit, before your candour would have suffered you to impute such a grievous crime to the Rational Dissenting ministers, who, you tell us, Essay on Discipline, page 55, "entertaining sentiments in religion different from those of their people, and such as their people would not have borne with, they endeavoured to keep them (*i. e.* their sentiments) as much as possible out of view." This is doubtless a crime of so heinous a nature, that your thus publicly charging them with it, naturally supposeth your provocation has been great. Moreover, your familiar acquaintance with them is attended with peculiar advantages, such as no Orthodox writer can pretend to; being thereby led to the very spring of their dissimulation, which we now find to be "a fear of losing their subscribers."* "In this situation of the generality of Dissenting ministers, they will necessarily feel themselves restrained from doing their duty by the fear of giving offence, and of losing the affections and contributions of their more considerable hearers. Are not your ministers men, and men of like passions and interests with yourselves?" A very candid and honest confession, indeed: of the greatest use in leading us into the scope and ultimate aim of the Rational Dissenting ministers, with whom it is apparent that the contribution of a considerable hearer, is of more weight than the most rational sentiment, seeing rather than lose the one, they will disguise the other. Do not you think, sir, that people of less penetration than yourself may in some measure be justified in preferring an honest enthusiast, who preaches to the extent of his knowledge and belief, to a Rational Dissenter, who, for fear of losing the contributions of his hearers, keeps his own sentiments as much as possible out of view? I really wonder that a gentlemen of your known integrity and philosophic turn of mind should be persuaded to associate with such a herd of dissemblers; whom you and I have convicted of the most heinous crime of concealing the truth from their hearers for fear of losing their subscriptions.

This leads us to account for that contempt in which they are held by the people, who, as you tell us, page 41, Essay on Discipline, have "in some societies expressly forbidden

* Essay on Discipline, p. 47.

the ministers their houses, except they come by special invitation."* If this be your own particular case, indeed I pity you, Doctor; and I think your people are very much obliged to your ingenuity, in so gently covering their shame even when you rebuke their folly. This prohibition, laid upon the Rational ministers by their hearers, would naturally lead us to suppose that the conversation of the ministers was too grave and serious for the taste of their people, if you had not all along discovered such disgust at grave and serious religion; for which they can by no means be blamed. We have therefore but one way left to account for it, and that is, by supposing that the people received but very little profit by the company of their ministers; otherwise they never would have forbidden them their houses. This seems very likely to be the case, as certainly a man who can conceal the truth in the pulpit, will make but little scruple of doing it in private. We have quite the advantage of you here, for it would be thought a very strange thing among the Orthodox, if a minister was denied the liberty of eating a bit of pudding with any of his hearers whenever he was in the humour so to do. Yea, more, Doctor, one of the principal complaints that you shall hear from the Orthodox against their ministers, is, that *they do not visit their people often enough;* which at least shews that they are not tired of their company.

It would require uncommmon talents indeed for a minister, how cautious soever he may be, so absolutely to keep his real sentiments out of view, but that they will peep from behind the curtain sometimes; the devil himself, as some people say, is not such an absolute master of dissimulation, but he is found out occasionally. Well, this dissimulation being detected, and the cause of it easily guessed at, it is no wonder that the Rational ministers are held in such contempt, "that a word of admonition from the pulpit would give unpardonable offence."† Seeing while the minister is telling them of their sins, they would be thinking of his dissembling his sentiments; and, as it is natural for us to favour ourselves most, they would be apt to conclude that his hypocrisy is altogether as heinous as their drunken-

* The passage is thus: "I am informed there are societies among us in which the ministers are expressly forbidden to visit their hearers, except by particular invitation."

† Essay on Discipline, p. 41.

ness and whoredom. To be sure, sir, a minister can never admonish with a becoming authority, either in the pulpit or out of it, whilst it is in the power of the admonished party to retort upon him, *Physician, heal thyself;* therefore the strictest integrity is necessary to that minister who would admonish profitably, let him be Orthodox or Rational. You tell us that, in many places the congregations of the most Rational ministers are dwindled away to nothing, notwithstanding the excellency of their compositions; and if you would know the reason of that, sir, you may consider that one grain of honest zeal is of more esteem with the generality of hearers, than the greatest ingenuity that can discover itself in sermonical compositions. All are not judges of that Rational ingenuity which you so much applaud, but most people are intelligent enough to discern when the minister really aims at their everlasting welfare, and does what he can for its advancement. It is observable enough, that this dwindling away has always been most discernible in those congregations where the minister has been most remarkable for "keeping his sentiments out of view, and cautious of admonishing, for fear of losing the affections and contributions of his most considerable hearers." On the other hand, it is equally observable that among the Orthodox, those ministers are most loved and followed who are most faithful in reproving and admonishing sinners, both when in the pulpit and out of it, without any regard had to what may or may not be the consequences of such admonition. And those places of worship are best filled where the minister warmly and zealously declareth the whole counsel of God so far as he himself has learned it. How can those congregations prosper where they are entertained with a disguised and deceitful ministry? For my own part, I would rather choose to sit under such a ministry as that of tinker Bunyan, or cobbler Howe, where I should be sure to be sincerely dealt with, than that of a learned, ingenious Rational Dissenting minister, who strives as much as possible to keep his sentiments out of view. It must indeed be very mortifying to gentlemen who have engrossed the whole of Rationality to themselves, to see the Orthodox ministers loved, esteemed, and followed, whilst they with all their pretensions, "are considered as persons who are paid by their hearers for haranguing them once a

week."* Contemptible, however, as this estimation of their ministers is, it is certainly very just; and what they have brought upon themselves by their silent connivances at sin, and their concealment of truth from their hearers for fear of losing their subscriptions.

Young Samuel's message from God to Eli the priest, concludes with a passage very applicable to the present case of the Rational Dissenting ministers, and which may be very instructive, if attended to with seriousness, "for them that honour me I will honour; and them that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." That the Rational Dissenting ministers are lightly esteemed, you and I have sufficiently shewn; is it therefore not unworthy of themselves to inquire into the reasons why they are so lightly esteemed even by their own people? To assist in this inquiry, be it observed, that here is an express promise, that all who aim at the honour and glory of God shall be honoured by him, among his people; but they (the Rational Dissenting ministers) are despised among their people, and are even forbidden their houses, instead of being beloved, honoured, and obeyed; which supposeth that they have been too much like the sons of Eli, who sought their own gratification and not the glory of God: for God who has promised is faithful, and will not deny himself. Do not you think now, that if, instead of concealing their sentiments, and shamefully conniving at the sins of their people without daring to admonish them, the Rational Dissenting ministers had studied to maintain consciences void of offence towards God and man, by being faithful in reproving sin wherever it was found, and honestly declaring the whole counsel of God as far as they knew it, that they would in all probability have been more respectable in the eyes of the very people, who, as things are, have forbidden them their houses? But having dishonoured God, he

* In short, a Dissenting minister amongst those who are usually called the Rational Dissenters, begins now to be considered as a person who is paid by his hearers for haranguing them once a week; and the people attend this place of divine worship, if not from mere unthinking habit, with the same views with which they would attend the lectures of any other person from whom they expected instruction or entertainment. Ess. on Disc. p. 41.

If I understand this passage aright, the Doctor means that the people attend the weekly harangues of Rational ministers with the same views with those who attend the lectures on philosophy by Mr. Ferguson and other gentlemen for instruction; and the giddy multitude who gape at the entertaining lectures on heads by George Alexander Stevens.

hath brought them into that contempt which you complain of. God hath said, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully; for what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?" Jer. xxiii. 28. But instead of obeying, having got the word of the Lord, as they think, more perfectly than their neighbours, they conceal it in their hearts, and keep it as much as possible out of view, for fear of losing their most considerable subscribers. This is a dishonouring of God by preferring their own temporal emolument to the success of that which they take to be the truth, and shews them to be lovers of the world more than of the word of God. The word of God chargeth expressly that we shall not suffer sin to rest upon a brother, but that we shall in any wise reprove him for it; but they admonish not, because, as you say, "the least hint of an admonition from the pulpit would give unpardonable offence." How is it possible, Doctor, that such men should be otherwise than lightly esteemed? I assure you, sir, if this account of the Rational ministers had not come from one who cannot be suspected of doing them injustice, I could not have believed that such a contemptible race of mere scholars existed among us. If a minister is faithful to the light he hath received, God will make him as a brazen wall and as an iron pillar among the people, who, if they fight against him, shall not prevail: but if he is afraid of losing their contributions, the same God will confound him before them, and bring him into contempt. I really wish that you, sir, and your brethren, might seriously and attentively consider these things without prejudice: for if it should in the end appear that you are now fighting against God, a retrospective view of your present conduct will then yield neither profit nor pleasure. I hope you will bear with me, if I express it as my opinion, that you have not weighed the great and important truths of Christianity with that impartiality and attention which the nature of the subject required; but upon detecting some things which you took to be absurd among the people called Orthodox, you have too precipitately fled absolutely to the utmost limits of the opposite extreme. But remember this, sir, that the middle path of judgment will be always found to lie between the two extremes; therefore, to avoid what we take to be an error on one hand, we ought to be very careful lest we

plunge into a greater on the other, and so the remedy prove worse than the disease.

Being informed, " that with the generality of those who are now called Presbyterians in England, the whole government of the society, with respect to morals, is in the hands of the minister,"* that the Rational Presbyterian ministers " found it necessary to dissemble their sentiments, by keeping them as much as possible out of view, because their people would not have borne with them,"† that they " find themselves restrained from doing their duty for fear of losing the affections and contributions of their most considerable hearers,"‡ so that they dare " not give a word of admonition from the pulpit;"§ it is not at all marvellous that " the very idea of ancient church-discipline should be lost among you, and your system be found so very imperfect,"‖ that if " it were possible for a primitive Christian to see the order of your churches, he would hardly think there was the appearance of your professing yourselves Christians,"¶ especially " as those who do not believe in Christianity do almost every thing that ye do."** After such a humbling view of the effects of Rational religion in the entire loss of church-discipline among your friends, one would hardly have expected to hear you declare, that " in your opinion it is better to have no church-discipline at all, than that of the Independents."†† Yet even here it is much if you are perfectly agreed with yourselves, seeing you give it elsewhere, as your opinion, that " it is better to have the power of discipline in the hands of the minister, or any other body, than to have no discipline at all." To this I should however object, unless it should appear that the minister is a man of integrity, who dares openly avow the truth, and who will rather choose to lose the affections and contributions even of his richest hearers, than keep out of view any truth, the knowledge of which may be useful to the souls of men.

To do evil with a design to promote the cause of truth, and to pull down the church of God with a view to build up the Gospel in its simplicity, is a conduct so absurd, that, from your account of the Orthodox, it could only be expected to be found in their tabernacles. But to hear the

* Essay on Discipline, p. 40. † Ibid. p. 55. ‡ Ibid. p. 47. § Ibid. p. 42.
‖ Ibid. p. 45. ¶ Ibid. p. 41. ** Ibid. p. 43. †† Ibid. p. 39.

Rev. Dr. Priestley represent it as the conduct of Rational Dissenting ministers, is indeed astonishing! I think, sir, that these same gentlemen must be Antinomians, seeing their conduct, according to your account of it, says, "Let us do evil, and good shall follow (p. 55). Finding themselves more particularly incommoded and embarrassed with the extra duties of their office, they laid hold of every opportunity of abolishing them." Of all men, surely none so unfit to stir up others to the practice of Christianity, as those gentlemen who laid hold on every opportunity of abolishing the duties of their own office, finding themselves incommoded and embarrassed by them: it is therefore natural to suppose that admonition from them must give unpardonable offence to every intelligent hearer, who had opportunity of seeing their own endeavours to abolish the extra duties of the pastoral office. The abolition of the duties of their own office was not thought sufficient for the promulgation of Rational religion, but every other office-power within the Rational churches must be abolished also; for we are told that as the ministers found "the bulk of the people, and especially the church-officers, who were generally the more serious and zealous of their members, continuing strongly attached to the opinions in which they had been educated (i. e. Orthodox opinions), the ministers found themselves greatly incommoded by them.—In this disagreeable situation the ministers purposely neglected to fill up vacancies in church-offices, and were in general heartily glad when they became entirely extinct."* If this was not practical Antinomianism, certainly there is no such thing in existence. However, it does not seem to reflect the highest honour on these gentlemen, that they were opposed by the more serious and zealous of their congregation; nor dishonour upon the Orthodox, that the more serious and zealous should be of that persuasion. If your authority is to be depended upon, sir, as I think it may, it is very apparent that Rational religion obtained only the younger and more irreligious part of the people for her votaries; whilst the aged, the more zealous and serious, continued strongly attached to the Orthodox doctrine. If so, I cannot think that your own religion has any reason to boast of her superior excellence; unless it could indeed be

* Essay on Discipline, p. 54.

proved, that inconsiderate youth is more capable of the right use of reason, and forming a true judgment of divine things, than mature age and manhood. Besides, it does not seem to argue much in favour of Rational ministers, that they should be so heartily glad of the extinction of office-power by the death or departure of the most serious and zealous of their members, seeing it gives but too much reason to suspect that they possessed but little zeal, and had but a very faint relish for seriousness themselves. What if the serious officers in churches were of different sentiments from the ministers, and thereby a little incommoded them? Seeing they profess themselves to be gentlemen of such universal charity and unimpeachable candour, ought not they to have borne with the supposed weakness of the Orthodox serious officers, rather than to have destroyed the order and discipline of the churches?

I am, Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

LETTER IX.

REVEREND SIR,

It is something unaccountable to me, that the lamentable state of what you call the Rational churches with respect to church-discipline, does not cause some doubt concerning the foundation upon which they build, and the religious sentiments which they really hold, seeing you give it as your opinion, "That every set of religious sentiments must produce corresponding effects on the tempers and conduct of men." That the conduct of the Rational ministers in their office-character deserveth but little praise, you have very sufficiently shewn; and therefore from your own axiom it will be inferred, that a certain malignant influence is inseparably connected with their sentiments, which hath indeed been the opinion of some grave and intelligent persons long before you or I was born. The change of conduct amongst your churches is altogether as obvious as the revolution of their sentiments from Orthodox to Rational is remarkable, the cause of which you have ingeniously accounted for in the conduct of their ministers. It is indeed astonishing that, in the days of Orthodoxy, when all the Dissenters were, as

you think, absurd and irrational, yea even idolaters,* that their churches should have been on a regular Gospel plan, and that their more Rational descendants in these days of such enlightened reason should confessedly "be destitute of the common requisite of growth, or even the continuance of any society whatever."† This being evidently the case with them, your censure, "that with all their superior knowledge they are destitute of what they call common sense,"‡ seems to be extremely pertinent and judicious. That a goodly measure of common sense fell to the lot of my old friends the puritanical Dissenters, notwithstanding their idolatry in worshipping the Son according to the divine command,§ even as they worshipped the Father, and other absurdities of which they were guilty, as you clearly demonstrate, p. 50. In your very friendly debate with your Rev. brother Enfield, you have in great modesty laid the charge of idolatry against all Athanasians, and expressed your wonder that he should endeavour to vindicate them from your charge, as he is said to have done in *his trimming business of a Dissenter*, &c. You know the Puritans in general were Athanasians, and therefore, according to you, idolaters. Moreover, you are pleased frequently to give us a hint of the absurdity and inconsistency of the Calvinistical doctrines, which being considered as the opposite of Rational doctrines, must by you be understood as irrational; of course the case stands thus: "The old Puritans were both irrational and idolatrous, yet after all had common sense enough to form their churches upon a regular Gospel plan (as you tell us), and to maintain a strictness of discipline subservient to the best of purposes." Nor was this the case in one or two communities as a wonder of order amidst their absurdities; but on your own testimony it was so universally, "for all the Puritans and Presbyterians formed their churches upon this plan."‖ It is very strange, Doctor,

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to Mr. Enfield. † Ibid. p. 13. ‡ Ibid. p. 133.

§ John v. 23, "That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father, He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

‖ "The English Puritans, however, so early as queen Elizabeth's reign, proposed to change the churchwardens and overseers of the poor into elders and deacons." Neal, vol. 1. page 232. They held that the elders joined with the ministers should be overseers of the manners and conversation of all the congregation; that they should be chosen out of the gravest and most discreet members; that they should also be of some note in the world, and able if possible to maintain themselves. "As far," says Dr. Priestley, "as their circumstances would permit, all the whole Puritans and Presbyte-

that, with all your Rationality, "this regular form of a church, and the discipline to which it is subservient, should be now almost universally grown into disuse with you." According to the easy rules of common sense, it must be very difficult to account for it, how men who are inconsistent and irrational should maintain regularity and order, whilst the Rational and intelligent, or, as you more emphatically style them, persons of superior knowledge, have not even the remotest idea of church-order; insomuch that, as you say, "there is hardly the face of any thing that may be called discipline among you."

You cannot think, sir, how it pleases me to find such a gentleman as yourself, touching so frequently on the marvellous: of which we have yet another instance in page 37. "The whole system of discipline among the Independents has no countenance in our only rule of faith and duty, and no example for many centuries in the Christian church." That this should be the case is not so strange as to have it asserted by Dr. Priestley; who, in the last passage, I had the honour of quoting from him, highly applauds the same system of church-discipline. Had you read Dr. Owen on Church-Discipline for the old Puritans, and Mr. Maurice's Social Religion exemplified on the part of Modern Independents, you must have seen that there is in fact no material difference between them. Therefore, how *that* of the old Puritans was so regular and orderly, and *this* of the Independents so universally unscriptural, absurd, and dangerous, are matters of no small importance, and will require a genius not inferior to your own to determine. Nevertheless, were I to give my own sentiments upon the subject, I should think that, "an almost perfect uniformity of faith, and also the religion of the heart with respect to God,"* are far from being proper objects of ridicule, and should suppose that this may have at least a remote likeness to what the apostle means by "being of one mind." And surely an almost perfect uniformity of faith is better than to have no faith at all; which, if I understand you aright, you suppose may be the case with not only Rational Dissenters, but even with their very officers. "In this manner truth might be pro-

rians formed their churches upon this plan; but this regular form of a church, and the discipline to which it was subservient, are now almost universally grown into disuse among us."

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to Mr. Enfield, p. 34.

pagated more silently; and if once the elders, or the majority of them, were convinced, there would be less difficulty in bringing over the rest."*

It is very true, sir, that when gentlemen of the Rational order are pleased to take the propagation of *truth* into their own hands, they have need to use all their cunning, and go as silently about it as possible; though to be sure the Scriptural method of propagating the Gospel was somewhat more noisy, and its first preachers lifted up their voices like a trumpet, and shunned not to declare the whole council of God; but I suppose that two schemes so very different as the Gospel preached by the apostles, and Rational religion as defined by Dr. Priestley, must needs require methods of propagation equally different. I have always been of opinion that truth could hold up her countenance in the face of the sun, but you seem to be of a contrary opinion; and as I am not yet satisfied in my own infallibility, I shall not be too strenuous in this point, but shall reserve my anathema till a fitter occasion.

I really wonder whether or not you are serious, Doctor, in advising your people to choose elders whether they are convinced of the truth, or enemies to it? I have been so accustomed to consider Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus, as containing good and authentic rules for forming a just idea of the qualities of church-officers, that with me an elder who is not as yet convinced of the truth, appears to be an odd kind of an animal; but no matter for that, seeing I have not the honour of being counted a Rationalist. Yet, in our way of judging of things by common sense without any pretence to superior knowledge, we should think a man who is yet unconvinced of the truth, however rich, far from being the fittest man in the world for watching over the conversation of a religious society. Moreover, we should be apt to conclude that a consistory formed of one Rational minister, and twelve unbelieving elders, is such a convention, as the wisdom of all the apostles could not have devised.

There is yet another thing in which the first preachers of the Gospel and you are by no means agreed as to the choice of church-officers; and what is very observable, sir, is, that what you take to be a necessary quality for office-power, was never once thought on by them, any more than you have

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to Mr. Enfield, p. 112.

thought of what they accounted necessary. In p. 86, you direct "that one of the wealthiest be chosen for an elder." But they never once thought of riches or poverty in the case of choosing deacons, but simply directed to choose "men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," as very sufficient through divine assistance for sustaining offices in a Gospel church. After all, it must needs be confessed that churches which are established upon a different foundation, will require officers possessed of different qualifications: how far this may be the case with the Rational Dissenters, I hope you do not expect me to determine. One thing I must take the liberty of cautioning you against, Doctor, and that is, to beware of flattering yourself that you are the first who found out that riches are a necessary qualification for a church-officer; for I can assure you, that the Orthodox Dissenters themselves, absurd as you think them, have been in possession of this secret for time immemorial; and in the whole extent of this great metropolis you will not find one poor man a deacon in any church whatever, providing always, that there be any rich men belonging to the community. Ay, sir! so universal is this rule, that you cannot give a tradesman a better character as being a good man in worldly circumstances, than to say *he is a deacon of such a church;* therefore it will be ungenerous for you in future to pretend that Rational religion dwells wholly with your people, seeing I have proved to a demonstration, that in the article of choosing their officers, the Orthodox are as Rational as yourselves. Farther, if my informer deceives me not, the Sandemanian church in St. Martin's le Grand, that mirror of Gospel simplicity, is pretty observant of the same rule, and her elders are thought to stand upon a par with the deacons of other churches, in respect to the good things of this life. Indeed, it is pretty obvious, that those same elders, who receive nothing for preaching, are full as comfortable as the Dissenting ministers who live entirely by the Gospel. I cannot but admire their prudence in choosing to be put into trade. whereby they may procure hundreds instead of the few scores of pounds usually raised by subscription. This wise choice hath two very great advantages attending it; first, it gives them an authority equal to that of rich lay elders, because of their equal independency; and, secondly, it gives them authority to treat those minis-

ters with contempt, whose subsistence entirely depends on the subscriptions of their people. Indeed, sir, to be put into a handsome way of trade by the generosity of a church, is at least equivalent to a very good annual stipend; besides the many other advantages connected with it. How, then, can you pretend that reason dwells only with you, seeing the very Sandemanians themselves outstrip you in making comfortable provisions for their preachers, even when they give themselves out to be the most disinterested race of human beings? I give it as my opinion, that whenever the Orthodox shall take it into their heads to make provision for their teachers after the example of that *only church* in St. Martin's le Grand, they will find but little opposition from their ministers, who would be every whit as well contented with two hundred pound per annum, in a way of trade, as with one hundred in a way of subscription; and I dare answer for it, that the good women their wives will unanimously vote for the Sandemanian plan, whenever the affair is agitated.

As you observe, sir, with respect to yourself, so I may say that, "I am far from censuring those persons who are merely misled," yet I think they are very worthy of censure who, pretending to *superior knowledge* themselves, neglect the true, the only spring of spiritual intelligence more and more every day, as you tell us is the case with the Rational Dissenters of your acquaintance; with whom, "it is notorious that the Scriptures are every day more neglected, so that it is justly to be feared, that in a few generations, our posterity will have but a very imperfect idea of the contents of those sacred books,"* which with me is by no means an incontestable proof, either of their superior knowledge or piety, and may be thought by some to be but a very flimsy ground for their boasted Rationality. I am entirely of your opinion, that the Scriptures are grown almost into a total disuse with the Rational Dissenters, ministers as well as people; for such of them whom I have heard preach, most evidently drew more of their matter from Plato, Socrates, and Seneca, than from the disciples of our Lord in their writings of inspiration. That posterity is likely to have but a very imperfect idea of the contents of those sacred books, must certainly be admitted, seeing so

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to Mr. Enfield, p. 69.

many teachers have already attained to that degree of Rationality. When the apostles of your persuasion first began to exclaim against creeds, confessions, and systems in general, it was done under a pretence of adhering more closely to the inspired writings. Creeds, articles, and confessions of faith, bodies of divinity, and catechisms, are all gone, Dr. Priestley, and must the Bible itself likewise be superannuated? What rule do you think those gentlemen will next embrace? Dr. Harwood has done all that could be expected from such a circumscribed genius, to throw the New Testament into a more polite and gentleman-like form, but alas! there is this small disadvantage attending his (what shall I call it?) version, that even rational gentlemen, possessed of the smallest degree of either piety or common sense, can hardly give him thanks for his labours. But that the Bible which we make use of should grow daily into more general disuse, is what might reasonably be expected, seeing it is so very full of Orthodoxy, and testifies very solemnly against the leading sentiments of the Rational Dissenters. When the old-fashioned Bible is grown into absolute disuse with your people, and they are unanimously agreed to have a new one, better adapted to their views of things, if they should do me the honour to petition my advice on the occasion, I shall refer them to the Rev. Dr. Harwood, who may as well undertake to make a new Bible as to mend the old one. If they can but procure a Bible of Dr. Harwood's composing, with annotations by George Williams, gentleman's servant, his intimate friend, they will be on a fair way of being as rational as the most rational of Indians.

Now, Dr. Priestley, to give you another proof of my freedom with you, which is always a token of friendship, give me leave to tell you that the Orthodoxy which I approve, is all summed up, and lies very obvious, in this little old Bible of mine; nor do I hope ever to be able to hold a man to be rational or irrational, but as he adheres to, or departs from the lovely beauty of its divine contents. I think I shall envy no man his Orthodoxy on the one hand, nor his Rationality on the other, if I may but see the loveliness of Jesus in the Scriptures, and by them be made wise unto salvation.

I really think that it is not unworthy of the most ra-

tional of all the Rational Dissenters to inquire seriously into the cause of this growing neglect of the Scripture which you speak of; and should it be found that it is in the ministry itself, suitable measures for remedying the evil will, I hope, be thought the next object worthy of attention. It does not appear to me, that any thing has a more direct tendency to bring the Scriptures into a contemptible disuse, than the manner of preaching practised by some ministers, whose orations or harangues seem to have no dependance upon, or connexion with, the sacred writings. Lectures on natural, or, indeed, moral philosophy, are very far from leading the soul to Jesus as its all-sufficient dependance, and however excellent as a science, is contemptible, base, and spurious, when it assumes the name of Gospel. Were Jesus Christ and him crucified, more the preacher's theme, and instead of embellishing his composition by the flourishes of art and science, he studied to recommend the word to every man's conscience, I think the people would be under a necessity with the Bereans to search the Scriptures, that they might know the truth of the doctrine.

Now, sir, to come to a conclusion, give me leave to observe to you that, if to despise and vilify the Orthodox because they differ from me; if to boast of my own superior knowledge; if to hold sentiments in private which I dare not openly avow; if to abolish church-officers, and let go the reins of discipline; and if to disuse the Scriptures, is what is called Rational religion, I must beg to be excused from embracing her: notwithstanding,

I am, Sir,

Your sincere well-wisher,

And humble Servant.

LETTER X.

To the Rev. Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S.

REVEREND SIR,

MANY months are now elapsed, since I did myself the honour of transmitting to you nine familiar epistles, written according to the humour,* which happened then to be

* "Humour which happened then to be regent," &c. In the letters referred, the author was of opinion, that the weakness, absurdity, and contradiction, joined with a spirit of ostentation, obvious in Dr. Priestley's religious pamphlets, were more proper subjects of ridicule than of serious disquisition: he therefore refers here to the manner or form, not to the matter or substance, of those letters.

regent in my fancy. But, alas! had I been as impatient for your answer, as Mr. Enfield is said to have been on a similar occasion, I might by this time, through a tedious disappointment, have been reduced to a state of either death or insanity. But although I have had the mortification to receive no answer, I cannot prevail with myself to decline the pleasure of writing to you again, how much soever you may be ashamed of your connexions with such an absurd writer. Especially as you persist in your resolution to vilify the person of my only Lord and Saviour; to divest him of his Godhead, without which nothing can render him amiable and lovely in the eye of an awakened sinner. Besides, I consider myself as bound to a farther correspondence with you, from a passage near the end of my fifth letter in the former packet, intimating my resolution to address you again, whenever you should see meet again openly to write against the doctrine of Christ's divinity. You have now, sir, furnished the occasion, and virtually called upon me to resume my pen, according to promise, by the publication of your "Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity;" and your "Familiar illustration of certain passages of Scripture." When the above pamphlets first came abroad, I paid little regard to them, seeing they were anonymous; but they being now ascertained the productions of your intrepid pen, I have thought proper to peruse them with attention, and to animadvert upon them after my own manner: a manner with which, by this time, you are in some measure acquainted.

I do not mean to give you a regular answer to the pamphlets in question; no, sir, I leave regular answers to regular thinking people, who can have patience and leisure to follow you from page to page, and from line to line: I shall at present satisfy myself with attending to one single article, "The Divinity of Christ," concerning which, we differ as widely as possible.

In perusing your penny Appeal, I was amazingly struck with the force and propriety of the concluding paragraph, in article *fifth*, which militates against the divinity of Immanuel; and which I think proper here to transcribe; notwithstanding it will give you some reason to conclude, that I begin at the wrong end of my work, which you know

some people can do and make nothing of it. "The great creed of the Mohametans (say you) is, *that there is One God, and Mahomet is his Prophet.* Now that Mahomet is not the prophet of God, it is to be hoped, they may in time be made to believe; but we must not expect, that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God."

Being engaged in the same great work of reformation with yourself, and wishing to see true and undefiled religion diffusing itself from sea to sea, from the river even to the ends of the earth; I have thought of a coalition of the Mohammedan and Christian religions as the most feasible scheme. Therefore I altered the Mohammedan creed, and read it thus. "There is but One God, and Jesus is his prophet." This, sir, is admirably adapted to the rational scheme, and may well be called the Socinian's creed: between which, and that of the Mohammedans, there is but barely the difference of one word, and that too not very material, on your supposition, that both Jesus and Mohammed are but men like ourselves. You know, sir, it is a matter of vastly momentous controversy, which of two persons, by nature on an exact level with each other, and ourselves also, shall be by us exalted to pre-eminence, according as they shall severally appear to be entitled, by their doctrines and their labours, to promote the good of mankind. The question then will be, Whether the Mohammedans shall receive the prophet Jesus, who is but a man like themselves; or Rational Christians shall receive the prophet Mohammed, who is also a man like themselves, and, as they allow, a man of the first attainments? The solution of this important question shall be the subject-matter of the following epistles, which I hope will furnish you with two or three hours' precious entertainment.

But before I proceed to this solutiou, you will please to give me leave to lay a suitable foundation for the coalition of parties, which I have proposed between Mohammedans and Rational Christians: by pointing out their essential agreement, respecting the person and offices of Jesus Christ. For if we can but find, that there is no essential difference between the Mohammedans and Rational Christians, respecting his person; names, circumstantials, and such lesser matters, may the sooner be got over. So

that if we succeed, the eastern world may either become Ratioinal Christians, or what you call the rational part of the western world may become Mohammedans. Which of the two shall be the event, is not very material; the difference appearing either very trivial, or the advantage greatly on the side of the Arabic prophet, as perhaps the sequel may discover.

In your conversion of the Mohammedans to rational Christianity, it will not be necessary that they should give up their faith in the Unity of God; their faith in this article being identically the same with your own, as will appear on the comparison. Were we even to attempt their conversion to real Christianity, they needed not to part with their belief of the *Unity* of the divine Essence, only to adopt the *Trinity* into their faith in the Unity of God; as the opposite of Unity in this sense was never received by real Christians in any age, not even by the Athanasians themselves. No, sir, it is only a slander raised against them by gentlemen of learning, of natural virtue, and of rational religion; who, to serve a turn, will not scruple to belie even their most conscientious neighbours. Witness the reverend Dr. Priestley's writings, especially his Essay on Church Discipline.*

To prove my assertion, that Mohammed's faith and that of Dr. Priestley are identically the same, respecting the unity of God, permit me, sir, to quote your own words, a little descant upon them, and then quote the words of the great *Prophet of Arabia.* You say,† "How is it possible that three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all divine perfections, so as to be *true, very,* and eternal God, and yet that there should be but one God? A truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it, *or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our creed, as utterly irreconcileable with the more favourite doctrine of the Trinity.* A term not to be found in Scripture. Things above our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be true; but things expressly contrary to our reason, as that *three should be one, and one three,* can never appear to us to be so."

* Page 17. † Appeal, pages 16, 17.

That the term *Trinity* is not literally to be found in Scripture is allowed; but the same may be said of the characters, "Rational Christians," or "Rational Dissenters;" also of that favourite phrase of yours, "Jesus Christ is only a man like ourselves;" and many other phrases, which pass current enough with you, as well as with your neighbours. However, sir, although it must be granted, the term *Trinity* is not in the Bible, it must at the same be owned, that the thing intended by it is found therein, whilst that passage, so adverse to yours and the Mohammedan scheme, stands so firm, after all the laudable efforts of rational religion have, in vain, been exerted for its eradication:—I mean—"There are *three* that bear record in heaven, the *Father*, the *Word*, and the *Holy Ghost*, and these *Three* are *One*."*

That this is above reason, to me does not very clearly appear; and that it is contrary to reason, as you are pleased to assert, is an affront offered to the soundest maxims of philosophy. That it is not above reason to allow, that three different principles may be requisite to constitute One *intelligent agent*, I hope Dr. Priestley himself is a living witness. You will permit me to observe, that, notwithstanding your vast capacity, you are an animal, formed of the earth like other creatures. The word animal, you know, is compound, and supposeth two principles existing in the subject to which it is applied. For instance, a creature is a creature, whether it be dead or alive; but it is not an animal unless it be alive. He is therefore one principle, acting upon another, to compose an animal being; a principle which quickeneth, and a principle quickened, yet these are both requisite to constitute animal existence. Besides these two principles, you have about you an immortal spirit, which must live for ever in a state of unspeakable bliss, or of infinite misery. This immortal spirit, dwelling in your animal frame, is that third principle which, joined to the other two, constitutes you a self-conscious intelligent agent. These three, thus joined, do not make three men, but one man, so that it is neither contrary to, nor above reason, that One may be three, and three One; for although you subsist soul, body, and spirit, you are not three Doctor Priestleys, but one Rational dissenting minister, or one Doctor Priestley.

* 1 John v. 7.

The light of the sun which shines around me, affects only my eyes, and is therefore very distinct from the heat of that splendid luminary, which warms my whole body. This observation led me to examine the sky, to see if there were not two suns; one, consisting only of heat, and the other only of light. But I have not as yet found any, besides the old-fashioned sun, composed of light and heat, *Two principles,* but One natural Luminary.* Even that little bit of fire, which falls to the share of some authors in the coldest days of winter, discovers three somethings, which seem essential to its very being. There is light, heat, and motion; without which, I believe, you never saw a fire kindled in your study. The light is very different from the heat, the heat from the light; and both are distinct from that motion discernible in the fire. And yet there are not on this account three fires, but one.

Now, sir, that an ignoramus, or what is much the same in your sense, an Orthodox Dissenter, should assert, that three distinct principles cannot exist, in one intelligent being, is no more than might be expected from their absurdity. But that a Rational Dissenter, such an adept in philosophy as yourself, should assert, that the truth contained in that proposition is contrary to reason, is not so easily to be accounted for: especially as you are a living proof of it in your own proper person.

Indeed, Doctor, whilst I see you and myself, consisting of soul, body, and spirit, you must permit me to deem it rational to believe, that the Godhead may subsist in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.†——But if you ask, how these Three are One, and this One is Three, I must beg to be excused from giving you a positive answer, till you shall have favoured me with an exact account of your own subsistence in soul, body, and spirit; how far these principles in your own frame are distinct from one another, and after what manner they are united together. I verily think we

* By principle, the author does not mean that from which the sun derived its existence; but that which is essential to its existence.

Principle in physic, or of a natural body, is something that contributes to the essence of a body; or whereof a natural body is primarily constituted. Chambers's Dictionary.

Which authority, I presume, will warrant the observation immediately following upon the fire.

† No more is aimed at here than to shew, that, among creatures, many may be pointed out, whose very being depends upon the union of distinct principles: the author invariably considering all attempts to explain the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, as daring and impious. What is seen, may be defined in time; what is unseen, must be left to eternity to unfold.

ought to explain our own essence, before we attempt to explain that of our Maker. But, that you may not think I want to evade any necessary inquiry, I hereby give it you under my hand, that the moment you shall have explained to me, in a satisfactory manner, the phenomena of the sun, of the fire, and of the human nature, I shall join you in studying to comprehend the Incomprehensible, and of finding out the Almighty to perfection; a task, believe me, in which few besides ourselves ever hoped for success; but what may not the vigilant exertion of our rational powers be able to accomplish?

However, sir, although you differ from all the reformed churches, as well as from Christ and all his apostles, you have the happiness of perfectly agreeing with Mohammed the great prophet of the Turkish church, and head of all mussulmen; as you will see by turning to the Koran, chap. 112. "God is one God; the Eternal God; he begetteth not, neither is he begotten; and there is not any like unto him." No man could express the sense of Socinians in a more agreeable and masterly manner, than this same Arabian *prophet*, as it follows immediately, has done, in his answer to the Koresh. You and this great prophet are perfectly agreed, "that God is One in person as well as in essence." The Christian church has indeed in all ages been of a different opinion from Mohammed, believing in the *only-begotten* of the *Father*, full of grace and truth; and has thought that he could beget only his own image. Mohammed is in my opinion, however, rather more consistent than yourself, as he entirely excludes begetting in God, because, as he says, there is none like unto him: but you allow of begetting, and that what is begotten of him, is the very image of his perfections; and at the same time, is but a man like ourselves. Of the two, commend me always to the most consistent, as the most rational and fit to be followed.

It is now time to shew your agreement with the same prophet respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth; but I beg leave to postpone it till I have the pleasure and honour of writing to you again; which shall be as soon as I think you have fairly digested this.

I am, Rev. Sir.

Your most humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XI.

REVEREND SIR,

It is beyond a doubt, that people have differed greatly in their opinions respecting the person of Jesus Christ. Some have taken him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, with Peter and the disciples; to be Immanuel, God with us, or God manifested in the flesh, with Isaiah, and the apostle Paul; even to be the Child born, the Son given, who is the mighty God, the everlasting Father. But on the other hand, he was, by a different set of men, thought to be but a *mere man like ourselves;* one that had no power nor authority but what was derived. Of this opinion were the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and Mohammed: of this opinion are Doctor Priestley, Mr. Graham, and all their Arian and Socinian brethren.

That you, sir, differ from all the confessions ever made by the reformed churches, whether Lutheran or Calvinistic, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is matter of your consolation, glorying, and boasting. My business in this letter shall be, to furnish you with greater grounds of boasting; by shewing the amazing affinity between your sentiments, and those of the prophetic Arabian, after whose doctrine almost all the eastern world has wondered for the space of six hundred years and upwards. After such a feather added to the plumage of your cap, will you ever in future assert, "that you are ashamed of your connexions with that absurd Shaver?"

To have such a colleague as the great *Mohammed,* must no doubt yield you the highest satisfaction, and most exquisite delight; provided we can but make clear your title to such a dignity; a dignity which undoubtedly must add a lustre to the name of Rational Dissenter, already so honourable with the thinking and wise. Therefore I shall endeavour, in this epistle, to point out the *oneness* of *Mohammedanism,* and what is by you and your friends called *Rational Religion.*

You know, sir, the leading principle of both religions, on the point before us, respecting Jesus of Nazareth, is, "that he is but a man like ourselves;" or, as in some places you express it more emphatically, "a man, *in all respects,*

like ourselves;" by which some would think, that even sin itself is not excepted; for were that to be excepted, he could not be in all respects like ourselves; unless, indeed, it could be proved that we are not sinners, and this perhaps might be attended with some degree of difficulty.

To investigate a subject of this importance requires some degree of method and perspicuity. We shall therefore begin with that position of yours, viz. "That Jesus Christ is not God, nor equal to God in any sense;" always keeping in our view your entire agreement with the prophet Mohammed. That wonderful man expressly declares,* that "they are infidels, who say, verily God is Christ the Son of Mary." And again,† "The Christians say, *Christ* is the Son of *God*. May God resist them. How are they infatuated!" Surely, Doctor no man could better have expressed your sentiments, than *Master Mohammed* has done. Your whole business, for years past, has been to oppose those who believe in Christ, as God over all blessed for evermore. With the Turkish prophet, you have not only charged all the Athanasians with infidelity, but even with idolatry.

Our archbishops and bishops are all sworn Athanasians, and therefore, according to you, idolaters, and according to Mohammed, infidels. This, sir, is a specimen of your charity and candour, and must greatly tend to recommend rational Christianity, if opprobrious names are deemed the fittest arrows of conviction, and abuse the most proper method of manifesting our candour. Mohammed well knew, that the person who should beowned the only-begotten *Son of God*, must be in all respects the only true and living *God;* on which account he considers it as infidelity and blasphemy to call Jesus by that name, *Son of God*. In this, therefore, he discovers more prudence than yourself, for, as I observed towards the close of my last, you own him to be the *Son of God*, and notwithstanding will have him to be no more than a man like yourself, forgetting the true character of the Child born, the *Son* given. That Mohammed then should deem the Christians infidels, for calling Jesus the *Son* of *God*, is not half so strange as your charging us with idolatry, because we honour the *Son*, even as we honour the Father.

* Kor. ch. 6. p. 133. † Ch. 9. p. 244.

Making mention of the *Son* of *God*, brings to my mind a saying of yours,* where you address the people thus: "You have been taught to believe that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is the *Son* of Man, as well as the *Son* of *God*, was *not Man*, but very and eternal God himself." I freely confess, that we have been taught to believe in him as the true *God* and eternal life; but then, sir, we have been taught to believe in him as Man also: therefore you have here done great injustice to our teachers, and ought to retract your assertion, if you wish to support your reputation for probity; unless, indeed, you can vindicate it, and demonstrate, that we have actually been taught to believe, that Jesus is not a man of the seed of David after the flesh.

Having had the felicity to point out the *oneness* of the Mohammedan, with the rational faith of Socinians, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, we may now inquire how far you and that celebrated prophet are agreed, respecting his work and mission. The words of the Koran† are very expressive, and analogous to your own absurd system. "O Mary, verily God sendeth thee good tidings, that thou shalt bear the *Word*‡ proceeding from himself; his name shall be Christ Jesus the Son of Mary; honourable in this world, and in the world to come, and one of those who approach near to the presence of God,—and he shall be righteous;—*God* shall teach him the Scriptures and wisdom, the law and the Gospel, and shall appoint him his apostle to the children of Israel; and he shall say, Verily, I come to you with a sign from the *Lord;* for I will perform miracles by *the permission of God;* I will heal him that hath been blind from his birth, and the leper; and I will raise the dead *by the permission of God.* I come to confirm the law which was revealed before me, and to allow unto you as lawful, part of that which hath been forbidden you—Therefore fear *God* and obey me. Verily, *God* is my *Lord* and your *Lord;* therefore serve him." The prophet Mohammed, in all this description of Jesus, hath rationally taken care to prevent his followers considering him as God; the better to prevent which, he ascribes all

* Appeal, p. 12. † Chap. 3. p. 63.

‡ Dr. P. says, Christ is called the Word of God on account of his being in a more eminent manner commissioned to declare the will of God.

his miracles to the permission of God, as is observed by his judicious commentators.*

The Pharisees and Scribes were also of opinion, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; believing, upon good grounds, that no man could do those works he did, unless God were with him to give him power to work such miracles; perfectly agreeing with Mohammed's notion, that Jesus wrought all his miracles by a divine permission.

You also, and other Socinians, are firmly of opinion, that the whole of rational faith consists in believing in Christ as a teacher sent from God, commissioned to work miracles, and to publish the new law called the Gospel; that is, so to moderate the old law, as to render the way of salvation practicable and easy. You say,† "Christ being appointed the King and Judge of men, has powers given to him adapted to those offices, especially the knowledge of the human heart, and the prerogative of declaring the forgiveness of sin, which always accompanies regal authority; but being assisted by divine wisdom and discernment, as well as by divine power in the exercise of this high office; it is, in effect, the same thing, as the judgment and mercy of *God*, displayed by the instrumentality of Jesus Christ."

To this agree the words of Mohammed,‡ "Jesus no other than a servant, favoured with the gift of prophecy, appointed for an example to the children of *Israel;* and he shall be a sign of the approach of the last hour." Here Jesus is a servant, consequently commissioned of God; favoured with the gift of prophecy; therefore, as you say, had communications from God, appointed as an eminent example to *Israel*, being commissioned to declare the will of God. So far, then, there is a perfect agreement between you and the great prophet of the mussulmen: as you may see in the foregoing quotation from *Al* Koran.

Orthodox Christians in every place, and in every age, have, indeed, embraced the Redeemer of mankind, as the blessed Immanuel, God manifest in the flesh. But the respectable Pharisees, Scribes, and doctors of old, the Mohammedans, the Socinians, and Arians, are all united in opposition to his proper and personal Deity, even when they acknowlege him a Teacher sent from *God*, and performing works peculiar to himself.

* Koran, p. 64. Lett. e. † Familiar Illust. p. 22. ‡ Kor. 360.

Once more, reverend sir, Mohammed and you are perfectly agreed, respecting the ignorance of Christ, as to the day of judgment. You say,* "Notwithstanding the divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark xiii. 32, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." The Orthodox, to be sure, have always understood our blessed Lord, as speaking here of his human nature only; and not without ground suppose, that seeing, as a divine person, he does whatsoever the Father does, he must as such know, whatsoever the Father knoweth. Moreover that the Father, in many passages of Scripture, intends the Deity in the Unity of its Essence, and the Son, the man Jesus, or the human nature of the Redeemer, standing in union with the divine nature. Hence they suppose, that whatsoever might be hidden from him as *man*, was not hidden from him as a Divine person. Some even think, that although this secret was hidden from Jesus, as man, during the first or second year of his ministry, it was certainly revealed to him afterward. Because he himself asserts that all judgment is committed to the Son, which they think requires an infallible knowledge, *how*, *when*, and *whom*, to judge, which could not be possessed, were the time of judgment concealed from him. Yea, he farther declares, that all power in heaven and earth was given unto him, which surely implies the knowledge of the proper times for the execution of this power.

But, sir, although my idolatrous brethren, the Orthodox, and myself, have the infelicity of thus differing from the rational and virtuous Socinians; Mohammed the Great declares himself entirely on your side of the question. Hear him, ye Socinian Doctors,† "They will ask thee (says Gabriel) concerning the last hour, at what time its coming is fixed? Answer, Verily, the knowledge thereof is with my *Lord;* none shall declare the fixed time thereof except he. The knowledge thereof is with *God* alone; but the greater part of men know it not." This prophet goes even somewhat farther, and allegeth five things of which, he says, Jesus was ignorant. Thus from the most perfect agree-

* Appeal, p. 13. † Kor. chap. 7. p. 219.

ment between Rational Christians and Mohammedans, in the essentials of religion, I think we have the fairest prospect of accomplishing a union.

Nothing now remaining but a few circumstantials, which may easily be got over by men of genius and resolution,

The only difficulty to settle is, whether Jesus and Rational Christianity, or Mohammed and the Turkish religion, shall be embraced? To determine which, it will be necessary to inquire, after the manner of Dr. Abbadie, which of them, according to your system of rational religion, was the best preacher, and maintained the fairest and most consistent character, as a good man, commissioned of God to to be an instructor of mankind. The consequence of which will be, that either the Socinians' scheme must be reprobated, and the doctrines of Orthodoxy be embraced, or we must all become Mohammedans, in order to preserve a consistent character. Then, sir, I presume, that you and myself will bid fair for being two of the first characters of the new-modelled church; a character surely not unworthy of the utmost exertion of all our rational powers.

In great hope of success, and the dawnings of that approaching glory.

I remain, Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XII.

REVEREND SIR,

YOU will recollect, that in the close of my last, I promised to attend to the resolution of that important point, whether the religion of Jesus, according to the Socinian hypothesis, or that of the prophet Mohammed, shall be universally embraced, as you know it must be a very desirable thing to have only one religion over the whole world; and especially, if we could get ourselves promoted to be leaders in that blessed system, and plan of operation.

The whole matter will, I imagine, rest on this single article, which of the two prophets appears to be most faithful, wise, charitable, and zealous for the glory of God; or, in other words, whether Christ or Mohammed is the better man, and sustains the most consistent character. This is,

indeed, a matter of hazardous inquiry, and what few besides Rational Christians would dare to attempt; what I, at least, should not be bold enough to undertake, had the subject been entirely new. But the ingenious, judicious Dr. Abbadie has paved my way, in his excellent Treatise on Christ's Divinity; a treatise which I earnestly recommend to the perusal of every Rational Christian, every intelligent Dissenter.

The nature of the subject requires a considerable degree of seriousness, therefore you will be obliging enough to forgive me, if I should dismiss the smile, which used to play on my countenance when I dealt in controversy heretofore. The present disquisition is no less serious, than to determine, for certainty, whether you, sir, and your rational brethren, be blasphemers; or myself, and the rest of the Orthodox, be idolaters, as you have most candidly represented us.

There is an infinite distance, you know, between the Creator and the most dignified of all his creatures; therefore God cannot be represented as a mere creature without blasphemy, nor can the creature be adored as God, without the most monstrous idolatry. If then, Jesus Christ be the true God, and eternal life, it must be blasphemy to say, "that he is but a man like ourselves." And if he is but a man like ourselves, or but a mere creature, how dignified soever, we must be guilty of shocking idolatry, in worshipping him, even as we worship the Father, as God over all, blessed for evermore.* You cannot be offended, sir, with my bringing the matter to this issue, seeing you have so illiberally charged the Orthodox with idolatry, though it should even turn out, that before I have done, I should convict you yourself of blasphemy against God in the human nature, and the grossest rebellion against your Judge of which you are capable. If I worship him according to the Scriptures, you must be condemnable for rejecting him; and I must be condemnable for worshipping him, provided he is that mere creature you are pleased to represent him.

It is an observation made by some, that those who doubt the divinity of Jesus Christ, must also doubt the divinity of the Scriptures. Which observation seems to be warranted

* Vide Dr. Abbadie, p. 6, of his "Treatise on Christ's Divinity."

from the proceedings of rational Christians in our day. One nibbles at this part of the sacred volume, another nibbles at that; for instance, the Song of Solomon is very offensive to some, the Apocalypse to others; whilst some of their brethren are equally offended with the Book of Daniel, part of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah, some of the Psalms, and many passages of even the Pentateuch itself. Which spirit of scepticism evidently betrays a doubt of the authenticity of the whole volume of Inspiration. This accounts for the new name (not on a white-stone) given by some to Rational Dissenters, I mean, that of *Christian Deists;* for which distinction they have as yet discovered very little thankfulness to their benefactors. The Trinitarians, on their part, think it not consistent to suppose, that God should create a whole race of rational intelligent beings, and leave them without any given law, any obligation to walk according to his will; therefore they conclude, that some revelation of his mind has been given and preserved in the world for the general use of mankind; that wherever it is given, it must be an entire perfect revelation. They have carefully examined all the writings of the learned and wise, from Moses down to Dr. Priestley, and find on examination, that no book bids so fair for being that inspired code of laws, as this same blessed, though antiquated book, the Bible; consequently the carping and cavillings of modern sceptics, against this and the other part of revelation, cannot to them be very agreeable.

You have been pleased to dignify our people with the name of idolaters. When this fit of zeal for rational religion was upon you, I hope you considered naturally the import of the charge, as opposite to the glory of God and our own salvation, and indeed incompatible with either. Idolatry introduceth more gods than one, as Mohammed charges all the Christians with doing, and with which you yourself are pleased to charge all the Orthodox, *i. e.* the king upon the throne, the bishops upon the bench, all the conscientious clergy of the established church, as well as those among Dissenters, who can subscribe the doctrinal articles of the church of England. Indeed, to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, as we do, if he is, as you say, only a man like ourselves, must be more contrary to the glory of *God* than the grossest paganism. This is to advance a

mere creature, yea, a creature not of the highest order in the creation, to all intents and purposes, to an equality with the infinite Jehovah. Idolatry more shocking than was ever devised in nations the most barbarous, for they never exalted their subordinate deities to an equality with him whom they accounted supreme.* Idolatry then, sir, being so very heinous in itself, so dreadful in its consequences, and the worshipping of Jesus Christ as God, equal to the Father, being the very worst species of idolatry, according to you and the prophet Mohammed; it is high time it were eradicated, and a more consistent system adopted.

You say, that there are not *Three* that bear record in heaven, and in effect, that it is a villanously-interpolated passage which asserts there are. The prophet Mohammed also has repeatedly declared his implacable enmity against the doctrine of the *Trinity*, as irreconcilable to his scheme of reformation. According to this, it will, it must, appear, that Christianity had, by some fatality, corrupted, the true religion, and that Mohammed restored it to its pristine purity. That the immediate followers of Jesus worshipped him as God, let their writings bear witness: and that in after ages, that corruption was indulged, your own writings sufficiently testify; therefore, beyond a doubt, religion was corrupted in the first ages of Christianity, seeing the people were then addicted to worship the *Son*, even as they worship the *Father*. But Mohammed arose, a great prophet and reformer; he corrected the errors of Christianity, and taught the people to worship *One God*, in one person only, just as you would have us to do; and to obey one prophet, even as you would wish a teacher sent from God to be obeyed. The Orthodox, indeed, in an invariable manner, have to this day continued to worship *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost;* believing that there is no medium between *Christ's* being the true *God*, the same in

* Hear therefore, and consider, ye Orthodox; your religion is the rankest of all idolatry, if it is true that your Redeemer is but a mere man, in all respects like yourselves. Know assuredly, that Christian idolatry, is the very worst idolatry that ever was invented.

It is as contrary to the true interests of the immortal soul, as it is to the glory of God. For if you are idolaters, according to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's representation, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; consequently you must all be damned. Idolaters are shut out from the kingdom of God; this rational gentleman has proved (I mean, asserted) that all Trinitarians are idolaters, therefore you must either be shut out, or he must appear to be a lying prophet, as well as his friend Mohammed.

essence with the Father, or his being an arrant *impostor*, influenced by the spirit of Satan. But the *rationals* having imbibed the spirit of *Mohammed*, adopted the doctrines of the *Koran*, are concerned every where to destroy the worship of the Trinity; and especially that of *Jesus Christ*, setting up in its stead the worship of *One God* in one person only, and reducing *Jesus*, his prophet, to a level with themselves: a mere man, such as Mohammed professed himself to be. Thus it is clear to a demonstration, that the fathers have in all ages been corrupters of religion, and that the author of the Koran, and the Socinian doctors have been, and still are, the true reformers, who teach us not to receive nor acknowledge the *Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*

So striking the harmony between Mohammed and yourself, and so very pertinent the language of his Koran, that I have often wondered, why you quoted not his authority to authenticate your doctrine and to confound the Orthodox. Permit me, sir, to refer you to the prophet himself.* "O ye who have received the Scriptures! exceed not the just bounds in your religion, by raising Jesus to an *equality* with God; neither say of God any other than the truth. Verily, *Christ Jesus*, the *Son* of *Mary*, is the Apostle of *God* and his *Word*, which he conveyed into *Mary*, and a spirit proceeding from him. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not *there are Three Gods:* forbear this, it will be better for you. God is but One God. Far be it from him, that he should have a Son—Christ doth not proudly disdain to be a servant unto God."

Again, yet more, if possible, to our purpose,† "They are surely infidels who say, Verily, *God* is *Christ* the *Son* of *Mary;* since *Christ* said, O children of Israel! serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Whoever shall give a companion to God, God shall exclude him from paradise, and his habitation shall be hell fire. They are certainly infidels who say, God is the third of *Three;* for there is no God, beside one God. And if they refrain not from what they say, a painful torment shall surely be inflicted on such of them as are unbelievers.—Christ, the Son of Mary, is no more than an apostle; and his mother was a woman of

* Kor. chap. iv. p. 126. † Chap. 5. p. 146.

veracity.—Behold how we declare then the signs of God's Unity; and then behold, how they turn aside from the truth. Say, will ye worship any besides God?" &c.

Now from this long quotation from the prophet Mohammed, would not any body take him for a Rational Dissenter, educated by such a tutor as Dr. Taylor, or Dr. Priestley? Or, in other words, would not one, who is well acquainted with the fundamentals of the Turkish religion, on reading your polemical pamphlets, be apt to mistake you for a Mohammedan? I mean, respecting your essential principles of religion, the doctrines of the *Trinity*, and the *Divinity of Jesus*.

The worshipping of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as *three persons* in the union of the divine essence, you say, "is the grand corruption of Christianity, and indeed, hath changed it into idolatry." The restoring of it therefore to its purity must be a great and good work, such as could not be effected by any other spirit than that of truth. Now Mohammed hath effectually reformed this abuse, and has purged all the eastern world from that idolatry, to which their forefathers were addicted, in worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ, as in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost. How is it, then, that he can be that impostor he is represented, seeing the first principles of his religion are founded, according to you, in the purest truth, and he hath been the author of such a great reformation, as restoring religion from the worst kind of idolatry, to the worship of One God, and the acknowledgment of Jesus, as a teacher divinely commissioned? Without doubt, this notable prophet was under the influence of either a good or a bad spirit: if of a good spirit, he cannot be an impostor; if of a bad spirit, how could he work such a reformation? Did the devil consider it as his interest to have Christian idolatry abolished, if to worship Jesus be idolatry, as you assert; surely this would be to have Satan against himself; a practice contrary to the uniform tenor of his conduct. In short, it must follow, that either God is to be worshipped in Trinity in Unity, and Jesus embraced as the adorable God-Man; or that Mohammed was the true prophet of the living God. That is, in plain terms, so long as you and your friends reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and God, you

must own yourselves to be Mohammedans, instead of Rational Dissenters.

If God is not to be worshipped as *Trinity* in *Unity;* if Jesus is not to be received as the adorable *God-Man*, it follows, that the whole Christian church has been in a state of the most monstrous idolatry for time immemorial; consequently that none of the Orthodox have entered into the kingdom of heaven. But if there are *Three* that bear record in heaven, the *Father*, the *Word*, and the *Holy Ghost;* and if these *Three* are *One*, it will follow, that Mohammed and his Socinian brethren are guilty of blasphemy, and must be turned over to a just and equitable Judge, who is declaredly jealous of his own glory.

Having taken up much more time than at first was intended in the preliminary part of my letter, I shall have room for little more, than to propose the plan of our future correspondence; I mean, in the present series of epistles. The leading design, you know, is either to have what you call Rational religion renounced as a dangerous, enthusiastical, and fanatical delusion; or, having your rational doctrine sufficiently authenticated, to establish the pure religion of the Mohammedans upon your foundation. In order to which, I shall shew,

1. That if Jesus Christ be nothing more than a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser man than he, or all the prophets who went before him, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers.

2. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was more truly benevolent, and exerted himself more for the benefit of mankind, than did *Jesus* of Nazareth.

3. If but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a more honest, and a better man, a far greater, and more consistent divine preacher.

4. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed discovered far more concern than Christ did for the glory of God and the purity of religion.

These shocking propositions being properly cleared up, it will appear, either that the *Koran of Mohammed* contains the true religion: or what you call Rational Christianity, is the rankest and most blasphemous enthusiasm ever yet invented to defile this world. And that according to

your doctrines, Mohammed must, in all respects, have the pre-eminence: but according to the principles of the everlasting Gospel, he will appear to be that false prophet, associated with the beast of Rome, and Jesus Christ shall retain his glory unsullied, and his dominion for ever entire.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIII.

REVEREND SIR,

THE subject of this letter, being an attempt uncommonly daring, would require a degree of resolution and intrepidity far superior to what I possess; I must therefore beg you will candidly cover, with the mantle of charity, what defects soever may spring from my timidity and ignorance; when treating on a subject of such very rare and singular discussion, as to prove the following alarming proposition. "If Jesus Christ, the author of the Christian religion, be but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser man than he, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers."

The wisdom of a man, as Dr. Abbadie observes, essentially consists in choosing the fittest means for attaining the end proposed. Therefore, sir, what lies now before us, is to consider their different ends in the establishment of their different religions, seeing they severally stand up as heads of the two greatest sects of religionists in the whole world.

Mohammed's design in the establishment of his religion, as acknowledged and declared by himself, was to make known the *supreme God, to be the only living and true God*, far exalted above every other being whatever: "To shew that he hath no issue, no partaker with him of the Divine nature, nor any similitude whatever." That this was the prophet Mohammed's leading design, will appear from his own words in a variety of places in the Koran: where he sets forth the perfections of his heavenly Majesty, in a magnificent manner, and frequently insists on his alone right to religious adoration. I might refer you to the various passages of that uncommon book, did I not consider you as an adept in the Mussulman learning.

That Mohammed laid his plan of reformation with the

utmost sagacity and wisdom, his success and the fruits of his doctrine testify. There is but one way by which we can judge of a preacher; that is, by the fruits of his doctrine: and he must be a greater reformer, indeed, who actually gains his point in every respect. Mohammed actually gained his proposed end effectually. He has so restored the worship of one God, *in one person only*, that for six hundred years and more, not one of all his numerous followers, has ever attempted to honour the Son, even as they honoured the Father, any more than if they had been bred *Rational Dissenters*, or Christian deists. This, you must allow, demonstrates the unspeakable propriety of the measures his sagacity pointed out, and the power with which his doctrine was accompanied. And all this was done consistently enough, with the utmost indulgence of sensual gratification; for Mohammed was none of those reformers, who deem the crucifixion of the flesh necessary; as his eleven wives could have testified, not to mention his concubines. Here was such wisdom, as neither Christ nor his apostles ever pretended to. They had not the least notion of people getting to heaven, any other way than by that of the cross. They considered a coalition between the world and true religion, as a thing impracticable, and therefore never attempted it. But the sagacious Mohammed both projected and executed that desirable scheme, and he has been followed by the whole race of rational Christians with success, not a little flattering to their hopes of an entire extirpation of the religion of the cross.

To turn now from the prophet of the Turkish church, let us a little inquire into the measures taken by Jesus of Nazareth. Compare his success with the former, and we shall see, that in reality there is no comparison.

If, as you say,* "it be perfectly clear from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that the person who is distinguished by the name of the Father, is the only true God, exclusive of the Son, or any other being whatever," it must follow, that the leading design of his coming into the world was to establish the pure worship of the Father only, exclusive of every other being, and that this worship must be the first principle of genuine Christianity.

If so, his success has been far inferior to that of the

* Fam. Illust. p. 12.

Turkish prophet, with respect both to the number of his followers, and the duration of his system in its purity. In point of number, Jesus has had very few followers, rational enough to worship One God, under any other notion besides that of Trinity in Unity; and even in our age, enlightened as it is, by your own confession, the number of rational Christians is very scanty. Whereas the successful Mohammed converted almost all the Oriental world; so that, what was said of lady Diana of Ephesus, *that all Asia and the world received her religion*, is more true when applied to Mohammed.

The Arabian religion has continued in its purity from its first institution, respecting its grand fundamental *Creed;* the whole Turkish church most steadfastly believe, "there is but *One God*, and that Mohammed is his prophet," and is as orthodox now as in the days of the prophet himself. But if the doctrine of the Trinity be as you say, "the grand corruption ofChristianity," it will appear, that Christ's religious system actually began to fall to pieces within the times of the apostles themselves. For in those times you tell us, "that mystery of iniquity began to work." Now, sir, as we have no other method of forming a right judgment of causes, besides the effects naturally produced by them, we are under an unavoidable necessity of preferring the measures taken by Mohammed, to those adopted by Jesus, the founder of the Christian religion. Of consequence, how shocking soever of thinking, that he was the wiser man, and taught his disciples with more force of argument. Mohammed delivered his doctrine in language plain and perspicuous, no way equivocal or ambiguous roundly testifying, that they were infidels who believed in Christ's divinity, or in the doctrine of the Trinity. But when Jesus institutes the worship of One God, the Father only, what language does he use? "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever (I) have commanded you."*

This, you know, was his last injunction to his disciples, and what is very properly considered as the institution of the Christian religion. And surely, if he hereby instituted the worship of the person of the Father only, as you will

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

have it, he was extremely unhappy in his mode of expression, and indeed gave occasion to the corruption of his own religion, by the ambiguity of his language.

The words of an institution of such importance should be plain and perspicuous. But who, upon reading this text, could at first glance imagine, that the worship of the Father only was intended? That although the *Son* and the *Holy Ghost* are named along with him in the same act of worship, they are not to be worshipped with him, under pain of damnation? It is certain, that if Jesus, in this passage, instituted the pure worship of the *Father only*, exclusive of the *Son* and the Holy Ghost; he has done it in such a manner, as to render his injunction totally useless to the far greater part of his professed followers. For now more than one thousand seven hundred years are elapsed, and but a very few to this day are capable of understanding his real meaning. Indeed, how should they, seeing his immediate disciples, on many occasions, spake in such a style as evidently implies Deity? which obscurity of theirs undoubtedly arose from the ambiguity of these expressions, in which their Lord and Master chose to deliver his doctrine. But I shall have occasion to give you a sample of their doctrine in a future letter; and shall therefore proceed in this to shew, that if Jesus Christ is in all respects a man, and only a man like ourselves, Mohammed acted more consistently in speaking of himself.

When shall we ever find him declaring that God and himself are one?—That those who had seen *him*, had seen the Father also,—That he came forth from the *Father?*—Or naming himself along with the *Father*, in one of the most solemn acts of religious worship? On the contrary, he frankly acknowledges himself not only to be a mere man, but even to be a sinner.* But all these things are asserted by Jesus Christ concerning himself, and he asks, Who can convince me of sin? Was it a likely way to persuade the people that God and *he* are *two distinct Beings*, to tell them that *he* and the *Father are* One. Could he find no other way of establishing the worship of the *Father only*, than by asking Philip, "Have I been so long with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me, hath seen the *Father:* and how sayest thou, Shew us the

* Kor. vol. 2. p. 378.

Father? Believest thou not that I am in the *Father,* and the *Father in me,?*" &c.*

And pray what could Philip make of all this, on supposition that his Master were in all respects, but a mere man like himself? Does this bear any likeness to that clear and nervous style in which the *Koran* is written? Has not such a declaration an evident tendency to confound Christ with the Deity, as one object of religious adoration?

One of these three things must necessarily result from the above declaration made by Christ to Philip.

1. That if he never meant to be considered as having proper Deity appertaining to him; he certainly was not a master of his own language, and did not know the influence his doctrine would produce upon the minds of men, in leading them into idolatry, by worshipping the *Son*, even as they worshipped the *Father;* considering the Father and the Son, in his divine nature, as one in essence. Yet the Christian idolaters, of every age and nation, have uniformly produced this text as a divine warrant for their procedure.

2. If ignorance was not the cause of such ill-judged equivocal expressions, we must have recourse to a cause still more *shocking* and tremendous to name. I mean, an impious design to impose upon the understandings of men, by making them believe, *he* and the *Father* were *One,* when, in reality, they were as distant from each other, as the distance between the *Creator* and the *creature.* Yea, he evidently leads Philip to seek for the *Father* no where but as dwelling in, and being manifested by, himself. How shocking are the consequences of Socinianism! For were that doctrine true, Christ must be a far greater impostor than Mohammed; as all the abominations of the Koran fall infinitely short of *Christ* himself, and by his apostles confounding him perpetually with *God.* The abominations of the Koran are in a manner sanctified by the inviolable regard through the whole of it, uniformly paid to the unity of *God.*

3. If after all it should be alleged that Jesus Christ is no impostor, but the true and faithful witness; so far from ignorance, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge dwell in him; that, therefore, he well knew the effects

* John xiv. 9, 10.

which his doctrine would produce upon the hearts of his followers, it must follow, that in union with the *Father* and *Holy Ghost*, he is the true *God* and eternal life; even *God* over all, blessed for evermore. But more of this in a subsequent letter, this being thrown in now only as a preparative for what I farther intend. I shall therefore conclude the present with this observation, namely, that if Jesus Christ be essentially One with the *Father*, as with my whole heart and soul I believe he is, it was quite natural for him to declare himself to be what he really is, and to address Philip in the above manner. Quite natural for him to join his own name with those of the *Father* and the *Holy Ghost*, in the administration of baptism; that he should perform miracles by his own personal authority, and suffer himself to be adored as *Lord* and *God*.

But then, what will be the consequence of all this, less than that Mohammed was a vile impostor; that all who deny Christ's proper Deity, are found guilty of the most abominable blasphemy: and that proud reason must be obliged to confess it cannot comprehend the Almighty to perfection.

I am,
Reverend Sir, &c.
J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIV.

REVEREND SIR,

IN my last I shewed, that, if the Socinian hypothesis be the genuine doctrine of Christianity, Mohammed must have been a far wiser man, and was much more successful in establishing the true doctrine and worship of the Creator, than Jesus; notwithstanding, in performing this dreadful task, which nothing but zeal for the honour of my divine Master could justify, my flesh shuddereth with horror. How much more, when in this and the subsequent Letters I clearly prove, That if Jesus Christ be no more than a mere man like ourselves, Mohammed was not only a greater preacher, but a better man?

If it is idolatry to worship the Son, which it must be, if he is a mere creature, both of which you roundly assert;

and if idolatry is so criminal in the sight of God, that those who are guilty of it shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, it may be truly said, that Mohammed exerted himself more for the good of mankind than Jesus did; and that we have profited more by his endeavours, than by all that Jesus did and suffered. This proposition may perhaps at first make you stare; but you will be obliged either to allow it, or what will be as mortifying, to own that you have grievously blasphemed the name of the Lord Jesus, my Redeemer.

At the time when Mohammed, a great prophet in Arabia, arose, the whole world lay in either Pagan or Christian idolatry, Jews and avowed Atheists only excepted. All that bore the Christian name, you know, you yourself have dignified with the name of idolaters; the last, adoring Christ as a subordinate Deity, or deputed God, were likewise guilty of idolatry, though less gross than the former in its kind. I say less gross in its kind, seeing, of all idolatry, none is so rank and shocking, as that which exalts a mere man to a perfect equality with the Father Almighty. Consequently, no idolatry so fatal to the true interests of immortal souls. This being the case, Mohammed exerted himself in such a manner, as to rescue the people from this idolatry, as far as he could carry his influence; and where there was a defect in his manner of persuasion, it was amply made up by the weight of his authority. For that prophet was one of the many who have assumed a right to compel people to enter the gates of salvation, precisely in the manner which they direct. Now, if delivered from idolatry of the most damnable nature is any blessing, what amazing advantage has the world received from Mohammed! The many nations who have embraced his religion, are all worshippers of *God* in Unity, and are all therefore, according to you, delivered from idolatry, and must of consequence be in a state of salvation.

On the other hand, what has Jesus done for the benefit of mankind, that may in any wise be compared with this, upon supposition the Socinian scheme be true? We allow that he went about healing all manner of diseases. But what is the performing a few cures upon individuals, when compared with the redemption of the world from idolatry? As for the Jews, to whom he was primarily sent, *they had*

been cured of idolatry before he was born of the Virgin, and at that momentous period, the bulk of that people most strenuously adhered to the worship of the Father only; a few persons excepted, who were waiting for God to be manifested in the flesh, which manifestation they accounted the consolation of Israel, and who worshipped God as Trinity in Unity.

It cannot even be said, that he saved any part of the Gentile world from idolatry; seeing that, when converted to the Christian faith, they only changed their worship from bad to worse. As undoubtedly it was less criminal to worship Diana, as a descendant of Jove, than to adore a mere creature as Jehovah's equal in power and glory. The moment the Pagans left their native gods, they embraced the idol of the Christians; so that it cannot be said, Jesus delivered any body from idolatry, according to your absurd scheme of irrational and unscriptural divinity. If it be said, he taught the purest morality ever known in the world, I am not disposed to deny it; but to say, what avails the best system of morality, if the first principles of religion are left corrupt? The best morality, founded upon idolatrous principles, will avail but little with a jealous God. And yet this must, according to your notion, be all that the best of Christians ever enjoyed. In what a deplorable condition, then, must Christ have left his people at his departure! Alas, ye Trinitarians, what must become of you?

Should it be added, "He gave his life in order to confirm the faith of his people;" it may be replied, "So have thousands of the Christian idolaters, worshippers of the Trinity;" but what are we the better for that, if we are still left in a state of idolatry? Besides, what real advantage to his followers, could a mere man like ourselves propose, by laying down his life for them? What virtue could there be in his, more than in our own sufferings and death? What a parade is here, about laying down his life to confirm the faith of his people, when, in reality, the far greater part of those, who are called by his name, remain to this day in a state of idolatry!

Moreover, if the death of Christ was designed to answer no higher ends, than to confirm the faith of his people in the doctrine he taught, it gives the prophet Mohammed

another advantage over him, which I thought not of before, under the head of wisdom. I have observed, that Mohammed never discovered any great inclination to mortify his own flesh, much less did he ever think of giving his life, to confirm the truths of *Al Koran;* but then, he had wisdom enough to take such measures, as to render personal suffering altogether unnecessary. He thoroughly confirmed the faith of his followers, without putting himself to such vast expense, of either labour or blood. It cannot be difficult to determine which of two prophets is the greatest, from such circumstances as these: seeing that, although Christ gave even his very life, in order to obtain his end, he could not accomplish it by confirming the faith of his people, who run directly into the worship of the Trinity, and of himself, as a divine person: but Mohammed accomplished his utmost wish, without any such sufferings, which undoubtedly argues the superior propriety of the measures he adopted; and this you know implies superior wisdom. For although the giving of his life, might in some sense be an evidence of good-will towards the children of men, it cannot, upon your plan of doctrine, be understood as any proof of Christ's wisdom; seeing all that has been done thereby, might have been accomplished without his dying.

It is not difficult to shew, that if Jesus Christ is but a mere man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was the best and most consistent prophet that ever appeared in the world. The Scripture prophets, for the most part, if not generally, came with the power of working miracles, yet could not restrain the people from idolatry; but he restrained from, nay, rooted out, idolatry without pretending to one miracle. From Moses down to Malachi, they bare witness to Christ who was to come; but it was in such a manner, as to give the people room to think that the promised Messiah was something more than a mere creature: most of them absolutely confounded him with the Deity; and some of them even ascribe deity, and all the works of creation, to him in person. David, in the spirit of prophecy, for instance, saith unto the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre."* By which address one could

* Psalm xlv. 6.

not readily conceive, that the Psalmist expected the singers upon *Shoshanim*, to intend no more than, "Jesus, thou art but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves;" and yet, according to your irrational scheme, he must have intended nothing farther.

Another instance of the absurdity of this prophet we have in Psal. cii. 25—27. Still addressing the Son of God, he says, "Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth: and the heavens, the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." This prophet must be considered as being either inspired by the Spirit of God, or not inspired. If inspired, then we expect from him the words of truth and soberness, even the very mind of God, with respect to what he delivers; and at the same time we have a right to suppose, that he means what he speaks, whether it be to God or man. Of course, if he calls Jesus God, whilst he knows him to be none other than a mere man, we have reason to question his being at all inspired. If uninspired, here must be an impious combination between him and the apostle to the Hebrews, to set up Christ not only as a pre-existent being, but as the God and Maker of all things; by which means the professors of religion have been misled into that monstrous idolatry, of worshipping Jesus as none other than God manifested in the flesh. I say misled them, for what man of sober sense could suppose, at first view, that with all this majestic parade of fine words, and hyperbolical expressions, the writer meant no more, than that the person, of whom he speaks, is a mere man like ourselves, and had no existence at all prior to being born of the Virgin; consequently, that he had not the least hand in laying the foundation of the earth and the heavens? To come at which sense, will require all the efforts of human wisdom, that is, all the subtleties of sophistry, and all the arts of evasion and perversion. But—What shall we think or say, when we find the apostle putting David's words into the mouth of the Father Almighty, as he does Heb. i. as if David's testimony was thought insufficient, unless it proceeded from him who is of one mind, and cannot be turned? This serves only to embarrass us the

more: for who can hear God the Father thus address his Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," &c. and from thence conclude that the Son is but a mere man like ourselves? Or thus, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands," and still conclude, that the person, thus addressed by the Father, had no being till within these eighteen hundred years.

This is consistent enough, and a glorious description of the Son of God, on supposition, that, in union with the Father and Holy Ghost, he be the true God and eternal life; but must be absolute nonsense, if your doctrine is true. It is ridiculous, for preachers to make use of ambiguous and hyperbolical expressions, such as must be bolted to the bran, before we can come at their real meaning; and that is the reason why I prefer Dr. Priestley to all the Arian and Socinian authors I have ever read. You speak so plainly, that he must be a blockhead indeed who does not understand your meaning; for which reason, I am of opinion, you will do more good to real Christianity, than all the preachers of the Socinian scheme that ever went before you.

You have attempted to frame an excuse for the abstruse, ambiguous, and equivocal style in which the Scriptures are written, according to your plan of docrine, from the manners of the Orientals, whose speech abounds with bold and striking figures. But I think there can be no beauty in any figure which tends to obscure, and less still in that which tends to invert, a doctrine. The true beauty of figurative language, lies in its explicative quality; whereas, all those passages of Scripture by you referred to, are darkened by figures ill-chosen and misapplied. If the Scriptures have suffered so much through the manner of writing amongst the Orientals, as to embarrass rational gentleman in their expositions of them; one would really wonder how the *Koran* came to be so perspicuous, as to render it impossible for the reader to be at a loss about the author's meaning, when speaking of the person of God, and of Christ, seeing he was an East countryman, as much an Oriental as any of the penmen of the sacred Scriptures.

He speaks very respectfully of Jesus, but then he always observes a consistency with himself, and with his leading

design, "of restoring the worship of one God, in one person only." Never shall you find him addressing a mere man like himself after this manner: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom: thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; they all shall wax old as a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." From which address it is clear to a demonstration, that David himself either worshipped the Son, as the God and Maker of all things, and so was an idolater like the rest of the Trinitarians, or that he imposed upon mankind, by writing that for their learning, which, in reality, he did not believe himself.

But Mohammed is clearly on your side of the question; and as he fully believed Jesus Christ to be but a man, in all respects like himself, he judiciously guarded against every thing that might induce mankind to think more highly of the prophet of Nazareth. There is not one expression in the whole *Koran*, that in the least tends to confound the person of Jesus Christ with the Deity. Wherefore I conclude, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more intelligent and consistent prophet than David, and therefore the *Koran* is preferable to the book of *Psalms*.

I am, reverend Sir, yours, &c,

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XV.

REVEREND SIR,

THE prophet next in eminence, as a penman of the Scriptures, is that noble Isaiah, of whom so many encomiums have been given by Christian writers: but who, in my opinion, falls exceedingly short of the prophet Mohammed, in clearness of style and strength of reasoning; on supposition that *God* never did, nor never could, exist in Trinity, and that Jesus Christ is no more than a mere man like our-

selves. The first passage of this prophecy, remarkable for its obscurity and ambiguity, is that,* "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel," quoted by the evangelist Matthew,† and by you explained away as far as could well be done with convenience.

As you have brought the art of explaining away an adverse passage of Scripture almost to a perfect system, I shall do myself the pleasure, for the public benefit, to transcribe some of your remarks in all their strength and beauty. "If we consider other instances of names imposed by the divine direction in the Scriptures, we shall find, that they do not always express any thing characteristic of the person on whom they are imposed, but that they were intended to be a memorial of some divine promise or assurance, respecting things of a public and general concern.—The Divine Being, by appointing Christ to be called Immanuel, engaged to manifest his own presence with his people, by protecting and blessing them, and inflicting vengeance on their enemies and oppressors. For this prediction was given upon the occasion of an invasion by the Israelites and Syrians."‡

I would not be guilty of denying, that this ingenious explanation has for ever disabled this prediction from being of any use to the Christian system, being tied down precisely to a particular occasion and period: but at the same time it serves to shew the obscurity of the prophet, as very far inferior to Mohammed, in point of perspicuity; especially when we take the prediction in its connexion with the circumstances attending its fulfilment. It is not easy to conceive, how the terrified Jews could be inspired with courage from being told, that, in about the space of seven hundred and forty years afterward, a young woman, a virgin, should bear a son, whose name should signify, *God with us;* nor indeed how the future birth of this extraordinary child, should prove the present destruction of those two smoking firebrands, *Rezin* and *Pekah*, especially seeing this child promised, when he should be born into the world, should be no more than a man like themselves.

Should we place this circumstance on a level with the

* Chap. vii. 14. † Chap. i. 23. ‡ Famil. Illust. p. 28.

naming of *Shear-Jashub*, as directed by you, and look on it as nothing out of the common way, it would only tend to perplex and bewilder us the more, and therefore demonstrate the obscurity of the prophet. "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, whose name shall be called *Immanuel*, but who, notwithstanding, is not *Immanuel*, but a mere man like ourselves." When this prediction came to be fulfilled, and the virgin actually brought forth her son, what wonderful phenomena appear! A new star, perhaps a new world, is discovered by the eastern *Magi*, and the hosts of heaven descend to hymn the birth of the Son of Man. The equivocal name given by the prophet to the virgin's son, and the festivity of the hosts of paradise, on his being born into our world, naturally lead us to consider this child, *as extraordinary*, and something more than a man like ourselves. So that if your notion be true, there was a double snare laid for the entanglement of Christians; the unmeaning, or at least inapplicable name imposed upon him in prophecy, and the august manner in which he was introduced into the world. Could this latter be consistent with the wisdom of God? Had the former any likeness to the clear and nervous manner of the prophet Mohammed? Surely not. For as I have before observed, he carefully guarded against every expression, that might produce a belief of Jesus Christ's being any more than a man like himself.

But the Trinitarians, or what is the same, Christian idolaters, have a very happy way of preserving the dignity of this prediction, in a perfect consistency with the whole volume of revelation, in resting satisfied with that explanation given by Paul,* "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." This does extremely well for the Orthodox, but is wholly incompatible with your absurd scheme of doctrine.

We consider this apostolical declaration as proclaiming the fulfilment of that prophecy, and believe that the Virgin's Son was none other than God incarnated in our own proper nature. And, indeed, it will be worthy of your sagacity to shew, how God could be said to have been manifested in the flesh of Jesus, if he had indeed no personal

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

union with Deity; and at the same time how God manifested in the flesh could be said to be received up into glory, if there was not a nature united to a divine person, which actually underwent that amazing change; or with what propriety blood could be ascribed to Deity, if flesh and blood had not stood in personal relation thereunto. I plainly foresee, that, if we give up the doctrine of the *Trinity*, and of *Christ's divinity*, we shall also be obliged to forego the Bible itself, as the most incoherent and absurd of all publications. Notwithstanding if taken in its connexion with these blessed doctrines, it is perfectly beautiful; it is a glorious discovery of the mind and will of all the persons in *Deity*, and of all the perfections of *Jehovah*.

But I have not yet done with the sublime Isaiah, seeing that passage in this prophecy, chap. ix. 6, is still more obscure, and more adverse to Mohammedanism, and what you call Rational Christianity, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty *God*, the everlasting *Father*, the Prince of Peace." I must beg leave to observe upon this passage, that, if your explanation* be the Socinian sense of it, and if their sense is the genuine mind of the *Holy Ghost*, this prophet, who has been so justly admired for his elocution and sublimity, must sink into contempt; nay, be deemed worthy of the severest censure, as a blind leader of the people, one who has given occasion of the stumbling of millions.

If these titles given to Christ are not expressive of what he really is in himself, but what God will manifest himself to be through him; it must follow, that the titles themselves are not proper to Christ, but God only; and consequently, that God himself must, properly speaking, be that child born, and that son given; an absurdity never so much

* In this, as in the former case, these titles may not express what Christ is, but what God will manifest himself to be in him, and by him; so that, in the dispensation of the Gospel, God, the wise and benevolent author of it, will appear to be a wonderful counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. If this name be supposed to characterize Christ himself, it will by no means favour the common doctrine of the Trinity; because it will make him be the Father, or the first person, and not the Son, or the second person. Besides, whatever powers or dignities are to be possessed by Christ, it is sufficiently intimated in this place that he does not hold them independent, and underived; since he himself, and all the blessings that he bestows, are said to be given, that is, by God; and at the conclusion of the prophecy, in the next verse, it is said, that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Famil. Illust. pages 29, 30.

as thought on by the Trinitarians, idolatrous as you have represented them to be. They never supposed that the divine nature was changed into flesh and blood; but that this promised seed should be conceived in personal union with the Word of God, who has an indubitable right to all the titles following, and so become the child born, and the Son given, considered in this relation. They cannot see how their considering the Son of God, as the everlasting Father of his church, can have any unhappy influence on the doctrine of the Trinity as you allege. But they very justly conclude, that if to worship Jesus Christ, as the mighty God, is really idolatry, this prophet is very blamable for his manner of speaking, and justly deserves punishment, as an instrument of bringing on their inevitable ruin.

Had he been studious of the good of mankind, would he not have guarded them against idolatry? How easily might he have expressed himself, in some such manner as this? "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, who is in all respects only a man like ourselves. He is not the wonderful Counsellor, nor the mighty God, nor the everlasting Father, having had no existence prior to his being born into the world; but by him, in the dispensation of the Gospel, God the wise and benevolent Author of it, will appear to be a wonderful Counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace, for it is not the child born, but God the Father, to whom these titles are applicable."* This would have approached near to the clearness of style used in the Turkish Koran. But to tell us that the Child born, the Son given, should be called God with us, when in reality he meant no such thing, is absolute Jesuitism; and if your doctrine should eventually prove true, I could never forgive Isaiah this egregious blunder, so fatal in its influence on the concerns of my immortal soul.

Shall we ever find the prophet of Arabia talking in such vague and unmeaning, not to say ambiguous and equivocal terms? He speaks of a child born, but keeps clear of every appellation which might lead men to worship Christ as the mighty God, or the everlasting Father, or even to think him more than a man like themselves. From which it is

* This is Dr. Priestley's exposition, Fam. Illust. of the passage.

clear to a demonstration, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a much better prophet than Isaiah, and of course the Mohammedan is preferable to the Christian religion.

But, sir, if the Child born, the Son given, has indeed a personal right to all the sublime appellations given him by the prophet, what horrid blasphemy must it be, to treat him only as a man, in all respects like ourselves; a being who had no existence till about seventeen hundred years ago! Think, sir, how terrible the wrath of a blasphemed Redeemer must be, wherever it falls! Is not this the rock that shall grind them, upon whom it falls, to powder?

To return to my subject, and that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth of my proposition may be established—namely, If your doctrine, that Jesus Christ is but a man like ourselves, be true, Mohammed was more clear, more consistent, than the prophet Isaiah; you will permit me to point out the remarkable obscurity of his fortieth chapter.

First he prophesies in verse 3, of John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner, in these very remarkable words; "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a path for our God." Again, addressing Zion in verses 10, 11, he says, "Behold, the Lord God will come, with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, shall gently lead those that are with young."

Here the person before whom the voice was to cry is expressly called Jehovah—Our God—and the Lord God. Yet this advent of the Lord God is expressly applied to Jesus Christ, and John his forerunner, in Matt. iii. and Luke iii. 4. And Jesus assumes the office and character of Shepherd, by the prophet ascribed to the Lord God, whose coming was promised, and before whom John was to prepare a way in the wilderness.

The following august description of this blessed Shepherd, who was to follow John, serves still to make the matter more difficult; as nobody could suppose the prophet describing a mere creature, who has not existed eighteen

hundred years. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand: and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" &c. &c. It would seem that the prophet had here exhausted the funds of eloquence, in order to set forth the greatness and grandeur of that Being who is the subject of his prophecy. But if, after all, he is no more than a mere creature, this must argue an entire want of judgment in the writer, or an impious design to lead us into idolatry, by worshipping Jesus Christ as the God of Zion. And yet if this was the prophet's design, the Lord Jesus actually connives at it, and even confirms it, by applying his words to himself, Rev. xxii. 12.

But what renders the prophecy still more ambiguous and obscure, is the cry which this voice was sent to publish, "All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever."—One would suppose that his leading design, in this passage, was to caution people against the folly of trusting in a Saviour, who is but a mere man like ourselves, seeing that all flesh is grass, and the most goodly humanity, abstractly considered, is but as the flower of the field—therefore, that none may warrantably trust in any who has not a personal claim to that divine character, the Word of the Lord or our God.

Surely no man but a Rational Dissenter could suppose, that all this magnificence of style was used, merely, to set forth a man in all respects like ourselves; a man who has not any the most distant title to personal Deity. No wonder, therefore, if Christians were so early seduced into idolatry, and that the well-instructed disciples of Mohammed, have continued so steadfast in the faith, that Jesus Christ is but a man like themselves, and that there is One God, in One person only, and that Mohammed is his prophet. I would therefore, for my own part, when I come to change my sentiments, much rather embrace the religion of the Turks respecting its fundamental doctrine, than that of the Rational Dissenters, or the sentiments of the Socinians.

I am, Reverend Sir, yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XVI.

REVEREND SIR,

WHAT has been said in the former Letters, may serve as a specimen of the confused language of prophecy, on supposition that your doctrine is true. I might add many more instances of equal ambiguity, but shall proceed to shew, that if Jesus Christ be not the adorable God-man, he must have borne the most sacrilegious character that ever existed, and must of necessity have been the greatest of all impostors; which is a thought so tremendous, that I scarcely know how to express it. But I trust, the character of my only Redeemer shall stand for ever unimpeached, whatever should become of Mohammedans, or Socinians, or even of the Trinitarians themselves. Yet this shocking consequence naturally results from rational religion, as it is very falsely called.

In prosecuting this affecting subject, I shall shew, that if Jesus Christ is but a man in all respects like ourselves, he has most certainly robbed the Almighty of his glory, both in the manner in which he wrought his miracles—and in his application of Old Testament oracles to himself, though they could not possibly be applicable to any person, who is not truly and properly God.

The manner of working his miracles shall be the object of my present attention, and I hope you will honour my remarks upon it with yours in the most serious manner. I do not mean to solicit your public notice. No, sir; perhaps you do not choose to reply to an ignoble correspondent. All I mean is, to request your candid perusal in private, seeing I have no pretensions to nobility.

The matter will begin with Matt. viii. 3, 4. "And behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." I lay no stress at all on the word worshipped, it might, for any thing I know, intend no more, "than a fine scrape and bow," but what I principally remark is, the manner of this same leper's address. "Lord, if thou wilt," &c. He does not say, "If God will," thou canst make me clean.—Not, if God will, he can give thee power to make me clean. What thoughts soever the Pharisees might have of Jesus, as but a man like

themselves, it is very plain, that this poor leper considered him as the Lord of diseases, who could say to this, "Go, and it goeth," and to that, "Come, and it cometh," or he would certainly have addressed him in a different manner.

What is more remarkable still, our Lord really encourages his error, and confirms his idolatrous belief, by answering the supplicant in his own form of speech, "I will, be thou clean." Who was he, that should take upon him to make people clean, if he was but a man like ourselves? Of all the men like ourselves, whom God ever raised up as prophets, we read but of one who attempted a miracle in his own name, and he severely smarted for his presumption.* I mean Moses, the man, the friend, of God, who, instead of sanctifying the name of the Lord at the waters

* If, to blunt the edge of this reasoning, it be replied, Elisha wrought many miracles without referring to any power higher than that which dwelt in himself, notwithstanding all were wrought by the power of the most high God: such as increasing the widow's oil, giving a child to the Shunamite, sending a messenger to Naaman, directing him to go and wash in Jordan, &c. it will be farther answered, To do justice to a personal character, we ought carefully to attend to every part of his particular history, and not pick out detached pieces, to the injury of the whole. If the history of Elisha is closely examined, and taken in its proper connexion, it will appear that God only was glorified in those miracles by him performed.

His entrance upon the prophetical office, was evidently a display of divine power, by which alone a double portion of the spirit of Elijah rested upon his servant Elisha. He had not power to cross the river Jordan, till he invoked the Lord God of his master, by whose power he divided the mighty waters. This, were there no more instances on record, is sufficient to shew, that all his subsequent works were wrought by the same ineffable power of Deity, and consequently in the same name by which he began to work his miracles. But he gave a son to the Shunamite, on which occasion we are not told that he called on the name of the Lord, and therefore this instance is in some measure parallel with Christ's working of miracles without calling upon the name of God.

He did give the Shunamite a son, but it does not appear, that he called not on the name of God on the occasion; but if he did, the very history of that child sheweth that he wrought not this miracle without a divine power supernaturally made manifest. Take the history together, and let the latter part explain the former; as it cannot be supposed that Elisha had less power to work miracles at the latter end, than at the beginning; and we shall see that he did not do even this without an appeal to the divine name.

The Shunamite visited him at mount Carmel, 2 Kings, iv. He saw the anguish of her soul, but he could not guess at the cause, because the Lord had hid it from him, till the woman disclosed the fatal event. Which done, he sent Gehazi, his servant, with very positive instructions for his procedure, in raising the child to life; but all in vain, for "there was neither voice nor hearing, and the child did not awake." When he himself arrived, he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon the child's eyes, his hands upon the child's hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and his flesh waxed warm. Now all this was accompanied with prayer to God, that the child's spirit might return to him again. From hence it is plain, the prophet wrought his miracles in such a manner as that God should have the honour of them all. But Jesus wrought his, so as the glory arising from them redounded to himself, and seldom mentioned the name of the Father in them. How different was the prophet's conduct from Christ's when he raised the widow's son of Nain, by only saying, "Young man, I say unto thee, *arise*."—Whereas Elijah, or Elisha, would in such a case have prayed unto the Lord, and said, "O Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this young man's soul come into him again." 1 Kings, xvii. 21.

of strife, struck the rock in his own name, saying, "Ye rebels, shall we bring water out of the rock for you?" The waters indeed followed the stroke, because God would support the honour of his prophet, even when he sinned; and took another method of punishing his rashness, namely, by shutting him out of the earthly Canaan.

Jesus refers to none greater than himself, but expressly says, "*I will*," not my Father willeth, or by the permission of God, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy departed from him. Not only so, but he goes on in an uninterrupted succession of marvellous cures, without once mentioning the name of the Father, yet is acknowledged by an audible voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." Does not this lead us to suppose, that the Father approved of his working miracles in his own name? Especially, when it is considered that the apostles did not work any miracles at all in the name of the Father, but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly *God* would not thus have given his glory to another, if indeed he had been another, seeing he had so peremptorily declared the contrary. And surely the glory of working miracles in his own name is proper only to Deity. Therefore *God* must either have given this glory to *Christ*, who was another; or *Christ* must have usurped it; otherwise he must absolutely be the true and eternal *God*, I mean, in the unity of the *divine essence*.

Now if he was but a man like ourselves, there was something inhuman, as well as impious, in the manner in which Christ sent the leper away, as, from what had passed, he must needs go away under a delusion; firmly believing, that the man *Jesus* had performed this cure by his own personal power and authority, which, according to your notions, must have been *downright idolatry*. So that the very cure he had obtained, might, from the manner of it, have become the occasion of his perdition, by leading him to honour the *Son*, as much as he honoured the *Father*.

This is the true conduct of Jesus according to your plan of doctrine. But it is as distant from the heavenly and compassionate conduct of the Redeemer whom I adore, as light is from darkness, or heaven from hell. Our Jesus being the blessed Immanuel, had a right to assume every divine honour, and could not be charged with robbing *God*,

though he actually made himself equal with the Father; but your Jesus, being only a man like yourselves, may very justly be charged with sacrilegious robbery, on applying to himself any of the prerogatives of *God* the Father.

The instance of healing the centurion's servant is equally remarkable for the strange and unaccountable manner in which it was performed. "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" why not, if he was but a man like himself? "But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed;" what, by the word of one who is but a man like ourselves? "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say unto this Go, and he goeth; and to another Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it," plainly intimating, that he considered Jesus as having the same power over diseases, as he himself had over his soldiers; at the word of command to call them, or to send them away: and in this lay the greatness of his faith, so justly celebrated by the heavenly prophet. Yet Jesus was so far from attempting to convince him of his error, that he even confirms him in it, by applauding his faith, and then granting his request, without any reference made to an influence superior to his own volition. Certainly if Jesus was but a mere man, possessed only of a delegated power, acting in every respect in a subordinate capacity, he was culpable in not calling upon that superior name, in which he performed all his operations. His disciples, how absurd soever in other respects, maintained a consistency in this part of their character; for although they wrought many miracles, they did none but in the name of *Jesus of Nazareth*. In this they did not ascribe to the power of the Father only the miracles which they wrought, but to his holy child Jesus; and they did not, like him, leave room to suppose, that they performed miracles by their own personal authority. Mohammed would have told the people in such a case, that he wrought only "by the permission of God;" as he indeed tells us was the case with Jesus; which alone seems to be the sense of the virtuous Socinian doctors.

The same chapter furnisheth us with three other instances of his miraculous power; in healing Peter's wife's mother of a fever—rebuking the wind and sea, as if he had been their maker and governor—casting legions of devils out of

the demoniac, and permitting them to enter into the herd of swine. We may well say, what manner of man is this, the touch of whose hand makes the leper clean, and banishes the most malignant fever? Who at pleasure controls the boisterous wind, and calms the tempestuous ocean? But when we follow the thread of the story a little farther, we must be shocked with horror, at hearing him give permission to devils, to drown and destroy the swine belonging to the neighbouring farmers. Might we not well ask him, as the Jews did on another occasion, "By what authority dost thou these things?"

You say, sir, that Jesus was commissioned by God. But have you duly considered the propriety of your assertion? Can it ever be, that God should give a commission to him to destroy the people's cattle without some cause on their own part? Or do you think, that drowning the swine was the readiest way to convince them of the truth of his doctrine? But every difficulty vanisheth, when we consider him as the blessed God-man, whose are the cattle on a thousand hills; and reflect, that those Gergesenes carried on an illicit traffic with the Gentile nations. Breeding swine for the use of the Heathen, though forbidden their own use by the national law; wherein swine's flesh was held an abomination. I say, when these things are considered, every part of the Redeemer's conduct is not only justifiable, but perfectly consistent with his legislative rectitude and authority: but he could never be justified, on supposition, that he was but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves. Neither would it give us a favourable idea of the benevolence of his disposition, nor even of his moral rectitude and virtue.

The account we have, Matt. ix. Mark v. and Luke viii. of his healing the woman with the bloody issue, exhibits something very dark and perplexing; as it manifestly appears upon the face of the text, that Jesus considered himself, and the evangelist also considered him, as the source of the miracle, exclusive of all superior influence. Mark says, that Jesus knowing in himself that virtue was *gone out of him*, turned about, &c. whereas he ought to have said, that virtue was gone out from God, by him as the instrument, according to you. But what must astonish every rational Christian, is, Jesus himself confirms the evangelist's testimony, Luke viii. 45; "Jesus said, Somebody hath

touched me: for virtue is gone out of me." Now if he wrought no miracles, but by the permission of the Father, as Mohammed says, or performed all his works by the power of the Father, as you would have us to believe, was he not shamefully wanting in zeal for God, to talk in this strain, "Virtue is gone out of me?" What virtue, I pray you, should go out of one, who is in all respects but a man like ourselves? If there is but One God, in One Person, the Father only, and if Jesus Christ was a teacher sent from him: was it not his business to lead the people to the Father only, instead of leading them to himself? But instead of that, he works miracles, and does not so much as mention the name of the Father in them: yea, even tells the people, that the virtue by which those miracles were effected, came entirely out of himself, as its source. Indeed, sir, it will be very difficult to clear the character of Jesus from the charge of *robbing* the Deity, on supposition, that he is no more than a man like ourselves.

To keep clear from every dead fly which might spoil our ointment, I would observe that, I am aware, you will allege in Christ's defence, that he made a general profession, upon more occasions than one, of subordinacy to the Father, and of his shewing good works from the Father, as John x. 32. But then it will be answered, why did he not, upon all occasions on which he exerted a miraculous power, bear this testimony, that the people might not be misled into a wrong notion of his person and authority? The leper, the centurion, the woman with the bloody issue, were sent away without any such information, or any caution against believing in him as the source of healing. Consequently this very profession serves only to embarrass his character the more; leads us to consider his conduct in the following light:—He knew all along, that he wrought no works but by the power of the Father; and on particular occasions openly confesses it: yet the far greater part of his works were performed without any visible reference had to the Father: and the subjects upon which he exercised his miraculous power, were for the most part left to conclude, that they were cured merely by the personal authority of the immediate operator; whereas a few words fitly spoken by him would have convinced them of the contrary. So that this, instead of clearing him from the charge of robbing the Deity, only serves to confirm it.

But every cloud disperseth, every difficulty vanisheth, when we consider him as, according to the Scriptures, acting in a twofold capacity, becoming his name Immanuel; as Man, and Mediator, acting in subordinacy to and by the authority of the Father: and as a divine person dwelling in the flesh, as one with the Father, acting in his own name, and by his own personal authority. And I think, without considering him in this light, it is morally impossible to clear him from the charge of duplicity, and of profanely robbing the Deity.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XVII.

REVEREND SIR,

IT is now time to come to Christ's application of Old Testament prophecies to himself, and to treat of his usual manner of confounding himself with Deity, in which, it shall be left to you to determine, whether such conduct can be justified by the laws of piety, or even by those of sober intelligence, on supposition always, that your plan of doctrine be genuine Gospel. You seem to be apprehensive of some difficulty, arising from this consideration, from the great pains you have taken in your Familiar Illustration, to explain away some of those passages of Scripture, which bear hardest upon your irrational scheme. This, sir, demonstrates the obscurity of the Scriptures, and may in some measure assist me in my determination, whether the religion of Jesus, according to your plan of doctrine, or the Mohammedan religion, shall be adopted.

Searching the hearts of the children of men is claimed by the Most High as his own prerogative, Jer. xvii. 10; "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins." This has been ascribed to him by his church in all ages, as might be shewn in numberless instances. And would we not from hence be led to suppose, that none besides the most high God could pretend to search the heart, and try the reins of the sons of men? Indeed the Scriptures of the Old Testament give all possible encouragement to this notion; for Solomon, in his prayer at the consecration of the temple,

2 Chron. vi. 30, says, "Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men." If I am not mistaken, that which is peculiar to God only, as searching the heart is here said to be, must in its own nature be incommunicable: for were it communicable to a creature, it could not be peculiar to God *himself*. Were it possible that God should communicate the power and prerogative of searching the heart, and trying the reins of the sons of men, to a mere creature, even to a man like ourselves, as you allege, it could with no propriety be said of him, that *he only* searcheth the heart; seeing another besides him actually knoweth the heart, and searcheth the reins of the children of men.

A teacher sent from God, must necessarily be considered, as one that knows the divine mind, especially in every thing relative to his own personal mission; one that will, on all occasions, preserve the most awful distance between himself and his Maker; for this seems to be essential to true piety, which, you know, cannot be separated from the character of a good man. We cannot therefore suppose, that Jesus was ignorant of Solomon's confession of the most high God, as the only searcher of hearts. His professed design in coming into the world was to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to destroy their testimony. We cannot therefore but wonder, he should suffer his evangelists to ascribe that perfection to himself, in flat contradiction to the testimony borne by Solomon. I say contradiction, on supposition that your doctrine were true. They tell us, that Jesus saw the thoughts of the Jewish cavillers; that he needed not that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man. Surely this was to all intents and purposes confounding him with that God, *who only* knoweth the hearts of the children of men.

But what must we think, when we find Jesus Christ applying Solomon's confession to himself in person? He gives us all possible reason to believe, that he is essentially that very being whom Solomon addressed on that occasion. Devout Solomon says, "Thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men." Jesus replies, Rev. ii. 23, "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." He even seems to wish this declaration to be published abroad by his heralds as the true doctrine of the Gospel; for he says, "And all the churches shall know, that I am he that searcheth the

reins and hearts." If therefore but a mere man like ourselves, he was guilty of the highest presumption, and took the most likely way possible to lead us into idolatry. For so long as we believe him to be the searcher of hearts, and trier of the reins of men, we are under an unavoidable necessity of worshipping him with the same divine honours which we ascribe to the Father. And should we be damned for so doing, must not our ruin be laid to his charge, who, by ascribing divine honours to himself, instead of maintaining that lowly distance becoming a creature, has been the occasion of it?

I do not wonder that people of your persuasion are so much offended with the Revelation of John the divine, as to wish it cut off from the sacred canon, it is so extremely adverse to your scheme of irrational religion; which, if the Scriptures be true, must be the absurdest system of enthusiasm to be met with amongst modern *Fanatics*. One caution, however, I would beg leave to give those enthusiasts, who are so zealous to get rid of this part of Holy Scripture; and that is, well to consider a certain passage in it, Rev. xxii. 18, 19, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and the things which are written in this book." If there is but a bare possibility of the Revelation being divinely given, and if its sacred contents are guarded in such a manner, that even to add to or diminish from them shall be punished with the severest penalty, will it not be very dangerous to attempt expunging of the whole?

After all, if it should appear at his second coming, that our Jesus is none other than the Ancient of Days, God over all blessed for evermore incarnated in the flesh, what a plight must they be in, who are now mad with enthusiastic zeal, against the doctrine of his proper Deity, as One with the Father and the Holy Ghost! These things certainly merit our most serious consideration, as our God is not to be trifled with.

Were this the only instance of his applying to himself those parts of Old Testament prophecy, which undoubtedly

have the supreme God for their object, it might be passed over as a peculiar instance, in which it is supposed the sacred penman was mistaken. But we find it to be his constant practice, as well as that of his apostles, and must therefore conclude, that either your doctrine is blasphemous enthusiasm, or he himself an errant impostor: as there does not to me appear to be any medium.

That in Isaiah lxi. is evidently referable only to the supreme God, from what is said in verse 8. "For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering, and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them." If the speaker can at all be known by his style, surely Jehovah is the speaker here; yet the same august person condescends to an humbler, even a subordinate capacity, and in the beginning of the chapter speaks of himself in the station of a servant, and sets forth the divinity of his mission as such. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me," &c. Here then is a servant, who calls himself Jehovah, and speaks, as if he were the supreme *God*, and lawgiver to his people. Yet *Jesus*, who, you say, is but a man like ourselves, in Luke iv. applies the whole of this to himself; for, after quoting this passage from Isaiah, he said, "This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your eyes." By which he must mean to persuade his audience, that he himself was the identical person there speaking in the spirit of prophecy.

The person whom the prophet represented, assumes the name and character of the Lord, or Jehovah; by which name *God* only is known in Jacob: but Jesus in effect tells the people that he was that person, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your eyes." I hate robbery, says he in the prophecy, but the contrary appears in the application of it to himself, on supposition that he is but a mere man like ourselves. "I love judgment;" but how does this appear, if he assumes divine titles and prerogatives when in reality he is not a divine person? "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them;" from whence one would, at first view, be apt to conceive him an everlasting Being; or how should his covenant stand? Moreover, that he had an essential personal right to make a covenant with his people.

What should we think is the design of a mere man, if

we heard him ascribing to himself the titles of the supreme *God*, and, at the same time, avowing himself to be the faithful and true witness? Must we not consider him as an impostor, and his doctrine worthy to be treated with the greatest contempt? It will be in vain to allege in his excuse, that the divinity of his mission warranted his assumption of those appellations, seeing such warrants, and such practices resulting from them, are wholly unknown among men. The commission of a prince will authorize his ambassador to speak in the name of his master, but will never warrant his assuming his master's name, and titles of honour. How would their high mightinesses, the states of Holland, look upon *Sir Joseph York*, were he to say to them, "I am king George III. defender of the faith?" &c. Would they not conclude, that he was either a traitor, or a madman? If he speaks only in the name of his master, they may understand his address; but if he should say, I and king George are one: or he that hath seen me hath seen king George, they would certainly be at a loss to guess his meaning. Even so, if Jesus had barely said, "The Lord loveth judgment," &c. the people might have known his meaning. But when he says, "I Jehovah love judgment, and hate robbery," &c. no man can think that he means to represent himself as no more than a mere creature. So that at all events, if to worship him as God in our nature be idolatry, he himself has given occasion to our error, therefore deserves the whole blame of our destruction, if we should indeed be damned for believing in him as such. These considerations make greatly for the prophet Mohammed, who never confounded himself with Deity; never professed himself to be more than a mere man inspired, not by the Holy Ghost, but by the angel Gabriel; consequently that his religion is rather be to chosen, than the enthusiasm of Socinians and Rational Dissenters.

But the answer which Jesus gave to John's disciples, when sent to him with a very peremptory message demanding a categorical answer, will farther tend to prove our position, and to give the ascendancy to Mahommed the prophet, as in all respects more tender of the divine character and perfections. Matt. xi. 3—6. "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye

do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

This answer was, in effect, the same as if he had said, "Go your way, and tell John that you have seen the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah fulfilled in my ministry;" for this answer is nothing short of a clear declaration of the fulfilment of that prediction, verse 4 to 6. "Behold your *God* will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing," &c. So says the prophet. And Jesus says, Go ye and tell John, that all these things are come to pass. Now, as it was never expected that these things should come to pass, till God came with vengeance, and our God with a recompense to save us, must not the answer given by Jesus naturally lead John and his disciples to conclude, that their God was actually thus come, seeing every sign of his coming was made manifest?

Here is no care taken either by the prophet, or by Jesus himself, to guard the people against paying supreme honour to that person, in whom such mighty works did shew forth themselves. But on the contrary they both concur, in giving us room to believe, that he was none other than God manifested in the flesh. Wherefore, if it be idolatry to worship Jesus Christ with the same worship which we pay to the Father, the blame lies not with us, but with himself and the penmen of the Scriptures. That he even intended to be considered as God in the human nature, is apparent from the conclusion of his answer, "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

It was not opening of blind eyes, unstopping of deaf ears, &c. which were a stumbling to the Jews: but the grand offence was, "he being a man made himself God." And surely they were in the right, seeing no man could possibly have understood him to intend otherwise, without plainly inverting his language. Had he bid John's disciples to tell their master what they saw, and at the same time to caution him against considering him as a divine

person, there would have been a propriety in his conduct, and he had not been accessory to the idolatry of his disciples, which idolatry shall be the subject of my next.

Meanwhile I would observe, that if there really are three that bear record in heaven, the *Father*, the *Word*, and the *Holy Ghost;* and if Jesus Christ is none other than the divine Word made flesh, and who dwelt among us; then his conduct is perfectly consistent; he stands acquitted of sacrilegiously robbing the Almighty, which he never can be, if your doctrine be true. I do not pretend to say, whether John's testimony be an interpolation or not, as I never saw the identical copy that may be called the original, I mean, that which was in the apostle's hand-writing. And this I deem necessary, before I shall believe those enthusiasts who affirm, its not having been the original. I verily think none but an enthusiast will be daring enough to make this assertion, without having previously examined that identical original copy, Therefore, from your bold affirmation of its being interpolated, I should suppose that you have been favoured with that privilege.

Once more we must repeat our observation in favour of Mohammed, that in no place of his Koran does he assume any divine title, or make use of language calculated to make his followers consider him as any other than a man, whom God had honoured as a reformer of religion. Never once in any sense confounds himself with God, having the most perfect abhorrence of that idolatry, which exalts a creature to an equality with God the Father. I conclude therefore, that if Jesus Christ be but a mere man like ourselves; one who has no personal title to divine worship, we had better at once reject the Bible as an abstruse book, stuffed with incoherence, ambiguity, and equivocation; and receive the Koran as the mind of God, a book which sets the doctrine of God and Christ in a more consistent, clear, and intelligible point of view, if your religion be indeed the truly Christian system.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. Macgowan.

LETTER XVIII.

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING in my last shewn, that if your doctrine be true, Jesus Christ must have been one of the most unintelligible, not to say the most dangerous, of all preachers; I shall attempt in this farther to demonstrate the proposition, by shewing the unhappy influence which his doctrine produced upon his immediate followers, who were, to all intents and purposes, as erroneous as the rest of the Trinitarians. I am the more encouraged to this, from the visible difficulty which even your adventurous pen laboured under, in endeavouring to find out their meaning, which, nevertheless, to this hour, lies as deeply concealed as ever.

Although I am, like yourself, one of those distinguished geniuses who love to strike out from the beaten path, as we have both abundantly shewn in former lucubrations; I shall find myself now under a necessity of following you from page to page, and from sentence to sentence, after the manner of polemic writers, or as Achilles followed the Trojan hero round the walls of the city.

You, sir, with all your high intelligence, seem to be aware of the difficulty of explaining many passages of the apostolic writings, and are therefore obliged to substitute a bold assertion in place of a rational interpretation, a method generally adopted by all enthusiasts. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews styles him (Christ), say you, "the author and finisher of faith. Which title is attributed to Jesus, with respect to the state of glory and universal dominion, to which he is exalted by the Father." It may be so, Doctor. But certainly, it is in the highest degree improper. Either Jesus is not, or he is, the author and finisher of faith. If he is not, we should not expect to hear him declared such by the Spirit of truth. If he is the author of faith, it will follow, that he is God as well as Man: seeing faith is, in every sense, not only the gift of God, but of his operation. Now if faith is the gift of God and of his operation, how absurd is it to assert, that Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of faith; seeing he is but "a man in all respects like ourselves!" Or, to gratify

curiosity a little, take the argument in the following order: If faith is only by the gift and operation of God, and if Jesus Christ be really its author and finisher, how, in the name of common sense, is it possible, that he should be *no more than a man like ourselves?*

Is it not clear to every rational reader, that if the apostles, in one passage of their writings, tell us, that faith is the gift of God; of the operation of God, &c. and in another, ascribe faith to Jesus as its author and finisher; their intent is, if they knew their own meaning, to make us believe, that Jesus Christ actually is God over all, blessed for evermore?

But enthusiasts and bigots to party opinions, will swallow any absurdity without attempting to digest it. If the apostles were then divinely inspired, and really knew their own meaning, will not this instance, from their writings, in some measure justify our worship of Jesus, in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as the true God and eternal life? If they knew not their own meaning, they were very unfit persons for being the founders of the Christian religion.

Take a view of the matter according to your notions, sir, and then judge of its propriety. Faith is the gift of God, and of the operation of God; Jesus is the author and finisher of faith, and yet he is no more God than we ourselves are. Or thus: "Jesus is the author and finisher of faith; yet is not faith either of his operation or his gift." What man of sound understanding would not wish to keep clear of a system of enthusiasm so big with absurdity, even when it imposeth itself upon mankind, as rational religion? It puts me in mind of the ass in masquerade in the fable. The lion's skin could not conceal the imposition. But to dismiss this passage I must say, that if the apostles knew Jesus Christ to be no more than a man like ourselves, they were exceedingly blamable for expressing themselves in language so obscure and equivocal, no such instance of ambiguity being found with the prophet of Arabia, when speaking of God, or of Christ Jesus.

Your long quotation from the books of the Revelation, will very little mend the matter, seeing it implies an unjust insinuation, as if the Trinitarians denied Jesus to sus-

tain any subordinate character. On the contrary, it has been their constant practice to set him forth as Man and Mediator, as acting in all respects in subordination to the Father. But they distinguish between his Divine person, abstracted from his humanity, as existing in the Unity of the Godhead; and his human nature as existing in union with that Divine person. They can therefore perfectly, and in the most rational manner, reconcile his supremacy as God-man with his subordinacy, as man and Mediator: whilst enthusiasts of every name confound themselves, by denying the one or the other of these characters, so essential to the person of our Redeemer. I sincerely wish, that our modern pretenders to superior reason were favoured with a larger measure of common sense.

But notwithstanding this subordinacy, as you observe, he says (and the saying must be very strange indeed), I am the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the *Almighty*. You say, indeed, "that these high titles are attributed to Jesus." But nothing can be plainer, sir, than that he attributes them to himself, which still must add to the difficulty. That Jesus is a teacher sent from God, to teach the worship of the Father only, and yet declares of himself, that he is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is, and which is to come, the *Almighty;* is a consideration that must puzzle every person of common understanding, who has not attained the address of leaping over the plainest testimony. Consequently, sir, it makes greatly for the point I have in view, namely, to shew the obscureness and ambiguity of Scripture-language, on supposition, that the Socinian scheme is the true Gospel of God our Saviour.

To soften that stubborn word, Almighty, you have critically observed, that it signifies Ruler over all. A notable discovery, indeed! a discovery becoming a comprehensive genius: especially when it is considered, that to be ruler over all, requires a person to be *mighty over all.* For if he is not mighty over all, how should he be *ruler over all?* How can it be supposed, that he can rule those beings over whom he has no power? And if he is mighty over all; after all this circumlocution, the word reverts to its usually

accepted sense, where I shall for the present leave it, and observe, that if he is mighty over all in any sense, in that same sense there is none mighty over him; or, to use your own phrase, if he is ruler over all, it would seem, that there is none who rules over him, in that sense in which he is said to be Ruler. After all, I think, in your exculpation of Jesus from the charge of ambition, and robbing the Deity, you might have found a more happy interpretation of the word *Almighty*, than that of ruler over all. That, you know, is proper only to the great God; and your ascribing it to the little *God* Jesus Christ,* tends to confirm us in our idolatry.

But supposing we could, by the depth of reason, make it appear, that the word *Almighty* means no more, than the sounding word candour does with Rational Dissenters, that is, nothing at all; we shall still find ourselves wofully perplexed by the other parts of the Redeemer's claim.

Admitting that you could take his omnipotence from him, what will you make of his being the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is to come? Which was, How long? Since the beginning of the Gospel.—Who told you so? Why are not the words "of the Gospel," inserted in the text? If the beginning is mentioned without any expletive, are we not under a necessity of understanding thereby, the beginning of Being or Existence; or, as it is otherwise expressed, the beginning of the creation of God? which was since his Being set up. This was from everlasting. Therefore I cannot say, though you can, when Jesus began to exist; because, in my view, he either existed from everlasting, or he does not now exist as the Saviour of sinners. There was, indeed, a man called Jesus, appeared about seventeen hundred and forty years ago, who made great pretensions to a divine mission. But what is that to me? I am not obliged to believe every one who comes with such pretensions. Besides, if he is not truly and properly God, I have much better reason to believe in Mohammed than in him; seeing Mohammed never encroached upon the province of the Almighty,

* Great God—A phrase familiar to the lips of Arians and Socinians, who, if they mean any thing at all by it, and allow Jesus Christ in any sense nominally, or by vocation, or otherwise, to be God, must necessarily account him to be but the little God.

never assumed names which might not be given to a mere man like ourselves. I never can, therefore, commit the keeping of my soul, and its everlasting concerns, into the hands of one, the beginning of whose existence is uncertain; consequently the Jesus you talk of can be no Saviour for me. This leads me to take notice of the wisdom of the Rationals, who knowing that they have only a poor impotent man for their Saviour, take care not to overload him, therefore take upon themselves to finish transgression, and make an end of sin; to propitiate the Deity, and work out their own salvation, under his common influences or assistance.

But, sir, if Jesus be what I with my whole heart believe he is; he had a just, a personal right to every part of this assumption. And to tell you the truth, if he is not the blessed Immanuel, God manifested in our nature, I would as soon believe in Dr. Priestley, or the pope of Rome, or Mohammed, as the saviour of mankind, as in him. This, sir, I give you leave to publish at large, as the sentiments of the absurd Sh—r, and if you please, for this you may write me down heretic.

To return now to my subject after so long a wander, a thing which, you know from former correspondence, I am in some measure subject unto; give me leave to note that quotation of yours from Heb. i. 6.* "When God bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him." The use of the word worship in other passages, and on other occasions, is not the object of my present inquiry, but the certainty of its ambiguity, according to your sense of it. As to the Jews having no expectation of any other person than a man for their Messiah, as you say they had, will admit of a doubt, seeing Dr. Watts, in his glory of Christ as God-man, has clearly shewed the contrary. Nor is the remark concerning Abraham's worshipping of the angels altogether to the purpose, seeing whatever he might think of two of them, it is clear, that to the third he paid supreme adoration, and entreated him as the most high God.

If Paul had said, Let all the angels of God honour him as a man whom God hath sent, we should have comprehended his meaning, and steered clear of that Christian

* Famil. Illust. 27.

idolatry into which we have fallen. But to be told, that all the angels of God must worship him, yet we ourselves must not pay him divine adoration, tends to perplex us with uncertainty. But this passage is clogged with another absurdity, namely, ascribing the name *first begotten* to Jesus Christ, as if he had been the first-born of every creature, and had an actual existence prior to his incarnation; which you are pleased to deny. So then the matter may be thus stated. Jesus is the first begotten, yet he was not begotten till four thousand years after millions of millions of angels and men were created, and is not now eighteen hundred years of age; whereas Adam is much above five thousand. The angels of God must worship him, and yet they must not worship him. All men must honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; and yet if any man ascribe the same honour to the Son which is due to the Father, he shall be deemed an idolater. Can that, sir, be Scripture, the word of the living God, which is big with such uncertainty? Thus beclouded with obscurity, that seventeen hundred years are now elapsed, and its meaning is still doubtful? Still a doubt, whether Christ is to be worshipped as God, or honoured only as a good man and a martyr?

From these remarks it is pretty clear, that your superior is an *ignis fatuus*, which bewilders you, and leads you into difficulties inextricable: whilst a consistent Trinitarian, with all his supposed absurdity, preserves the Scriptures of truth in their native harmony, beauty, and glory, as the word of that God, who is of one mind for ever and ever. I scruple not therefore to assert, and it is not difficult to prove, that consistent Trinitarians are the truly Rational Christians; and that the Socinians themselves are the absurd enthusiasts of our generation. But more of this in my concluding letter. I shall trouble you with nothing farther this post, than a remark or two on that passage, Col. ii. 9. "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The propriety of which seems to have struck you so agreeably, if your words be indeed expressive of your meaning.*

"This is a very proper expression, being strictly and literally true, though Christ himself was a mere man, since

* Fam. Illust. p. 22.

the wisdom and power of the One true God, the Father, were manifested in and acted by him."

So then, Doctor, you will go on to deal in mysteries, after all the salutary instructions you have received from so many different quarters. "A very proper expression; strictly and literally true," you say. I am absolutely of the contrary opinion, and consider it as a very absurd and improper expression; strictly and literally false, on supposition that he is but a mere man like ourselves.

Pray, sir, who is that Jesus you talk about so much, as upon a level with yourself, and who notwithstanding is the only person of whom it was ever said, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily?" Some people would think, that here you pay a very uncommon compliment to yourself. From which, indeed, it may be inferred, that you suppose the whole fulness of the Godhead to dwell bodily in you! as we must be under a kind of necessity of coming to this conclusion upon the premises. "In Christ (says Paul) dwelleth the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Christ is in all respects but a man like ourselves," says Dr. Priestley. Then must it not be concluded, that the fulness of the Godhead does actually dwell bodily in us as well as in him? O James Nailor! I lament the hole which the burning iron made in thy tongue, for thy supposed blasphemy, seeing the most rational gentleman of this enlightened age talks in strains far superior to thine in point of mysticism, impenetrable to the eye of common sense.

Again I ask; is this Jesus, the only person in whom the wisdom and power of the One true God the Father were manifested? Probably we shall find as great works performed in the name and by the power of God, through the instrumentality of others: works even of a more public nature, than any you allow to have been performed by Jesus of Nazareth. Did Jesus heal the lepers that came to him? So did *Elisha*. Did he raise the dead? So did that prophet. Did he shew the glory of God to his disciples on mount Tabor? So did the other to his servant on the hill of Samaria. Did he turn water into wine? *Moses* turned the rock into water. Moses and Aaron wrought all the wonders of God in Egypt—divided the Red Sea—made the serpent that healed the plague in Israel, &c. so that if the

wisdom and power of God, manifesting themselves by a man as their instrument, entitle him to be thus represented, with much more propriety may it be said of Moses or of Aaron, than of Jesus, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and yet no inspired penman ever ascribed this dignity to those Old Testament prophets.

It is certainly true, sir, that in all your studies, the doctrine of consequences has had but a very slender share. Permit me, a second time, to recommend it to your serious consideration.

Truly rational Christians, I mean, those who worship the *One God* in *Trinity*, as *Father*, *Son*, *and Holy Ghost*, avoid this difficulty, which absurd enthusiasts plunge themselves into. They clearly see, that how great soever were the works of Old Testament prophets, they were all performed in the name and by the power of another; but their Christ performed his miracles by his own power, and received the glory of them himself.

Moreover, is it not language dark and unintelligible, becoming none but a frantic enthusiast, to talk of Jesus being but a mere man, and yet the residence of the Godhead or the Divine Essence? To have the whole fulness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in him, and yet have no personal claim to proper Deity, or personal union with that same Godhead that is to dwell in him? Surely this manner of speaking is far from that plain and simple style which even the runner may read, and in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err.

It is every whit as difficult to conceive, how all the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily in a man, and yet that same ineffable Deity never to have been in any sense incarnated so as to dwell amongst us. Can any man therefore be blamed for giving the preference to *Mohammed's Koran*, a book that is clear from every sentence that so much as tends to confound either Christ or *Mohammed* with pure and essential Deity? although in so doing we are obliged to reject the Bible, as the most unintelligible and ambiguous of all writings whatever; as undoubtedly it is, if your scheme of doctrine be true.

I am, Reverend Sir, yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIX.

REVEREND SIR,

As I could not possibly do myself the honour of sufficiently explaining our subject by the last post, I hope you will have the goodness to bear with me, if by this I send you a few additional remarks upon the absurdity of the penmen of the New Testament, and the visible embarrassment in which they have involved you, and the rest of your reverend brethren; the preachers of a Jesus Christ in all respects like yourselves, and not yet eighteen hundred years existent.

It might have been expected that a gentleman of your comprehensive genius would have a little attended to the paradoxical paraphrase of John i. which I transmitted to you in my Familiar Epistles, before you had again adduced it in favour of your scheme. The paraphrase was just, upon your application of the text; and your silence has been understood to result from a conscious incapacity to refute. But as that same passage has been pressed into the service of the Socinian enthusiasm a second time, directly contrary to its genuine intention, I shall take the liberty to animadvert upon it, and on your application of it.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God," &c. &c. These words, you think, interpreted in the most literal manner, only imply that the Word, or Christ, had a being before the creation of the world, although he had, in reality, no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin: that he had the title of God, but by no means is to be considered as God,"* &c. So then God called him what he really was not; and thus became accessory to our idolatry. Was this acting the part of a wise and faithful Creator, or of a designing adversary? This cannot be the God in whom I trust, and whom I adore.

You have allowed that the above-mentioned passage, if literally interpreted, does imply, that *Christ Jesus* did exist before the creation of the world, and yet, in other productions of your prolific pen, you boldly assert, that he had no being prior to his birth of the Virgin. Even the subse-

* Fam. Illust. p. 30.

quent paragraph gives it as your opinion, that the apostle's intention was to overthrow the doctrine of his pre-existence.

I shall, for the present, admit that to be the apostle's intention, as it will suit my purpose as well as if I was to suppose the contrary, and will serve to manifest the grand object I have in view, namely the obscurity of the penmen of holy writ, on supposition that your doctrine be the Gospel of Jesus. I shall therefore consider it in both views as applicable either to Christ or to the power and energy of God. "In the beginning was the Word; the Word, whatever it was, was with God, and the Word was God, and yet was not properly God. The same was in the beginning with God, and yet was not in the beginning, nor for a great while afterward. All things were made by him, yet he himself was a made Being. Without him was not any thing made that is made; and yet every thing that is, was made, and the whole of creation finished four thousand years before he was born.—In him was life, such life as we ourselves possess; and the life was the light of men, by a virtuous conversation; and although he was but a man like ourselves, his light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.—He was in the world, and the world was made by him, though he did not exist for four thousand years after the world *was made*. He was in the world, and the world knew him not, although they believed in him as a man like themselves. This same Word was made flesh, and yet God was in no sense incarnated; he dwelt among us, and yet the man in whom he dwelt was no more *than a man like ourselves*. We beheld his glory, but it was not *his* glory, but that of the Father upon him; as the only begotten of the Father; and yet the Father hath many sons and daughters, begotten even as he was: full of grace and truth, and yet he is as much dependent on the Father as we are." Such, sir, is the true sense of the passage, according to your plan of doctrine, if applied to Jesus Christ, and how full of confusion and absurdity it is, the above may serve as a specimen.

I shall now take it expressly in your sense, as by the Word, the wisdom, power, and energy of God himself being intended, without any reference whatever had to Jesus Christ, as a divine person existing in Deity; and then we shall have an opportunity of seeing how much more it

looks like the ravings of *enthusiasm*, than the cool soberness of infinite wisdom.

"In the beginning was God, and God was God himself; the same was in the beginning with God—And God was made flesh, and dwelt among us; yet that flesh which God assumed had no manner of personal union with God. And we beheld the glory of God as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

Or you may take it thus, according to your amended explanation;* "In the beginning of creation were *wisdom and power; wisdom and power* were with God; and wisdom and power were God. *Wisdom and power* were made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld their glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So that at all events we must have *one* that begets *another*, that is *begotten*, even upon your pretendedly-rational plan.

But according to either of the above senses, I pray you, how much does the apostle's style rise above the level of nonsense? Whether we understand by the *Word* Jesus Christ, or the power, wisdom, and energy of God, it is obscure, ambiguous, and equivocal. It has a direct tendency to lead us to believe, that there was a Being called the Word, long enough before the Virgin brought forth her Son: one who was a distinct person from the Father, and who of himself had a proper claim to Deity. Consequently, if Jesus is in reality none other than a mere man like ourselves; and if the worshipping of him as God incarnate be idolatry, as you say it is, we have just cause to wish that John's Gospel had never been written; or that it had been burnt, rather than to have fallen into our hands. And you know that this passage, because of its great obscurity, has very much tended to mislead the idolatrous Trinitarians. They think it perfectly consistent with their own views of the Redeemer's person, and find no difficulty of accommodating it to their plan of doctrine; whereas nothing less than all the wisdom of the crooked serpent, will be sufficient to accommodate it to your scheme of rational religion, otherwise irrational enthusiasm.

I assure you, Doctor, that in reading your Familiar Illustration, I very often think of the mountain in the fable,

* Fam. Illust. p. 31.

which, after such a noise and outcry in labour, brought forth only a—mouse. I might give you numerous instances of it, if I were in the humour: but shall as usual quote just as many as I think necessary. The first of which is that Rom. ix. 5. from page 32 of your Illustrations. "Whose are the Father's, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. This may with equal propriety and truth be rendered, God, who is over all, be blessed for ever. The former sentence ending with the word came."

It might have been observed, however, that the word *came* is not in the text, but supplied by the translators with great propriety. You seem to confess, that our translation of the passage is just, supposing, indeed, that your own translation is only equally proper.

It was certainly very inaccurate, however, if according to you, the writer has left this passage in such a confused state, as to mislead the church for these seventeen hundred years. There have been men of learning in all the ages of the Gospel dispensation, and yet they could never see into this mistaken notion, but have gone on worshipping the Son even as they worshipped the Father. So that, at all events, it serves to shew the obscurity of the apostolic writings, which is the point I contend for, in favour of *Al Koran* and the *Mohammedan religion.*

To be sure, the Trinitarians, believing in *Christ's Divinity*, find no manner of difficulty in this passage. They think that the apostle could not have delivered the mind of the Spirit, if he had written otherwise. They rejoice that they have a friend, who can, without robbery of the Deity, claim an equality with the Father.

They think that no greater happiness could accrue to the human race, than to have one who is the friend of sinners, and, at the same time, is God over all blessed for evermore. But they frankly allow a right to depend upon their own righteousness, and to believe in a Saviour who is but a man like themselves, to gentlemen who are not sinners, but men of virtue; men of clear heads and sound hearts, who are capable of comprehending all that they will believe.

If Jesus Christ be not God over all, we have an undoubted right to censure the apostle for the obscurity of his style; but if he should prove at last none other than God

incarnate, I tremble for the fate of those enthusiasts who deny his proper Deity. "For if he that despised Moses's law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant by which the Son of God was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? Seeing vengeance belongeth to him, and he will repay it."

Like unto this, is that of 1 John v. 20. quoted by you,* and attempted to be explained away. But how ridiculously we shall see by and by. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The latter clause is undoubtedly explanatory of the title, him that is true, or the true One, as you observe. But I must beg your patience, whilst I remark, (1.) That not God, abstractly considered, is represented in Scripture, as the life of his people, but Jesus Christ, as appears from Col. iii. 4. compared with John i. 4. Is it not, therefore, evident confusion to tell us in one place, "Christ is our life," and in another, to direct us to a different person, and say, "This is eternal life."

(2.) Who is said to be the true One, besides him that declares himself to be the true and faithful witness, the truth itself? Is it not very strange to hear John pointing to an absolute God, saying, "This is him that is true," and at the same time, to hear a man like ourselves reply, "I am the true and faithful witness; I am the truth itself?" What can we think is either Christ's or the apostle's design? Which of them shall we believe, seeing both cannot be right?

(3.) Where are believers ever said to be in God, exclusive of a Mediator? But we are in him that is true, says the apostle. You say, him that is true, intends the One God, the Father only. Ought we not to have some Scriptural warrant for supposing ourselves to be in God the Father only? Would not this be something like ascribing personal union with Deity to ourselves, whilst we deny it to his only-begotten Son Jesus?

* Fam. Illust. p. 32.

Nothing can, I think, be plainer, than that the apostle intended us to consider Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, as *him that is true*, the Truth, or the true One; and that of him he says, "This is the true God and eternal life, in the union of the divine Essence." If he had any other intent, he might surely have hit upon a more happy and intelligible method of expressing himself, especially if inspired by the Holy Ghost, as is generally believed.

That passage, John xx. 28,* "Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord, and my God," must by no means be omitted, though I troubled you with my thoughts upon it, on a former occasion. Since then I have seen a very ingenious and uncommon explanation, written by one of your warm Kentish votaries, which in substance is as follows, "Thomas meeting Jesus very unexpectedly, in a surprise cried, My Lord, I did not expect to have seen you now—My God! is it you?" Thus this fanatical writer, who jumbles both houses of parliament, Doctor Dawson, and the Shaver together, in the same incoherent performance, supposes Thomas the apostle, in order to testify his joy at seeing his master, took the Almighty's name in vain: and that Jesus, out of zeal for his Father's glory, suffers that profaneness to go unreproved, and even encourages it.

Your explanation is much more genteel, but very little more to the purposes: seeing, with all your address, you have not exculpated the apostle Thomas from the charge of idolatry, in worshipping Jesus the Son as his Lord and God. If another, essentially distinct from Christ, is intended by Lord and God in the text, why are we not told of it in the context? If we are not told of it, how can we be justly damned for not knowing it? How can we believe without a preacher?

1 John v. 7; "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these Three are One." If you, sir, or sir Isaac Newton, really have seen John's original copy of this epistle, and carefully perused it, I must believe your assertion, "that this verse was not in it." But then it only serves to shew, that our Bible is, by the villany of Trinitarians, got into such a corrupt state, that it is high time to reject it, and embrace the Koran. I know divers others have as clearly proved,

* Fam. Illust. p. 33.

that it was in the original copies, but what then? still I shall carry my point, seeing that not one sentence of the Koran has been ever questioned in point of originality. Indeed, much is due to the testimony of sir Isaac Newton, provided he could read the book of Scripture with as much propriety as he could the book of Nature, but of this there are some doubters, who intend no disrepect to that astonishing genius. But the more his testimony avails, the sooner we shall get rid of the Bible, and have the Turkish Koran established as the pure word of the living God; reject Jesus, and embrace the prophet Mohammed as by far the most consistent.

That in 1 Tim. iii. 16, "God was manifest in the flesh," you tell us, is also in a corrupt state.* But why all this labour, in turning over musty manuscripts, enough to give one the pestilence; seeing you own, that even our translation is literally true? You say, that the Father, who was in him, did the works. This is what perplexes us, that the Father should live and act in the flesh of Jesus, as a soul lives and acts in the human body, and after all, this flesh in which God was manifested, had no manner of personal union with the Deity, any more than we ourselves have, according to your assertion.

One quotation more from the apostolic writings, and then I shall conclude, for really I begin to tire of the subject, it is so full of confusion; therefore I beg to be excused from following you any farther upon it, than just to note the impropriety of that, Col. i. 15, on supposition, that Jesus Christ had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin.

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

What could the apostle mean, by calling him the first-born of every creature, when some creatures were actually born more than four thousand years before him, according to your reckoning? To say that all things in heaven and

* Illust. 38. Note, referring to the great pains Dr. Priestley tells us he has taken in examining many rare manuscript copies of the New Testament.

earth, visible and invisible, were created by him, when the truth is, he created none of them, but was even a created Being himself? That all things subsist by him, seeing he is but a mere man like ourselves? That he is before all things, notwithstanding the heavens and earth, angels, men, devils, and brutes and vegetables, were, before him for many ages? I enter into no dispute with you, except, whether the apostle expresses himself in a manner in which people of common sense are likely to understand him, as intending a mere man, who had no being but a very few months or years before himself?

Yet I have heard this same Paul, by some of your people, highly applauded as a great man, a wonderful man, a prodigy of genius, &c. notwithstanding all his absurdities and clashings with your scheme of doctrine.

I am, Reverend Sir, yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XX.

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING in my two last given a small specimen of the obscurity and ambiguity of the apostolic writings, on supposition, that your doctrine is true; I shall in this venture to inquire, whether the conduct of the Jews, in putting Christ to death, ought to be justified or censured, supposing still that he was but a mere man like ourselves. Awful as it is, it may be inserted, that if he was only such, they had good reason for rejecting him as an impostor, and for treating him as a blasphemer: and this, if true, will make the idolatry of Trinitarians appear more gross and shocking. To ascertain this point, it will be necessary to inquire, whether they had a law against blasphemy, and whether they went according to that law in their proceedings against him.

The Jewish law inflicted death upon every blasphemer, as appears, John xix. 7. Lev. xxiv. 16. "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, all the congregation shall certainly stone him;"* and agreeably to this law, they took up stones to have stoned Jesus, when they apprehended him to be guilty of blasphemy, in making himself equal with God.

* Exod. xxii. Lev. xix.

Seeing they had a law which doomed blasphemers to death, it cannot be doubted, that the Sanhedrin, with the consent of the Roman governor, had a power of judging and condemning blasphemers, according to that law: seeing the law had been given in vain, if the executive power had not been lodged somewhere; and where so likely as in the great council of the nation, at a time when there was no king in Israel?

The main difficulty is to determine, whether or not Jesus Christ was guilty of blasphemy; and if but a man in all respects like ourselves, there is something so like it in his conduct and doctrine, that it is no wonder they understood him as blaspheming their God. Modern Jews may very well justify the conduct of their fathers, from the writings of his immediate disciples, whom they must necessarily consider as having been trained up in blasphemy, the blame of which they fail not to lay upon the master himself, as their teacher.

One disciple ascribes all the works of creation to him, whether of things visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, which is downright falsehood and blasphemy; a robbery committed against God the Father, on supposition, that Christ himself is but a mere creature, who had no existence for thousands of years after creation was finished. Another disciple addressed him thus, "Lord, thou knowest all things." It is in vain to allege, that *all things* here ought to be understood in a limited sense, and doth not imply an ascription of omniscience. If that is the sense, why are we not told so? Why did not Jesus correct the apostle's words, lest they should prove a stumbling to others? Would not any body take Peter to intend nothing less than omniscience in its utmost latitude, seeing the knowledge of the heart is one thing evidently referred to. Thou knowest all things, thou knowest "that I love thee." Which he could not do without searching the heart. But I have shewn, that he was so far from reproving Peter for this confession, that he even assumes this divine prerogative of searching the heart to himself.

No less than five times does Jesus in the Revelation assume the name First and Last, expressive of the eternity of the Most High, which a mere man could not do without shocking blasphemy, seeing God will not give his glory to another. Office and station will never warrant his assump-

tion of titles peculiar to supremacy, if he himself be in every sense subordinate, as you would have him supposed, and as the Jews considered him. This title, the *First* and the *Last*, being held sacred to the Supreme Being, throughout the whole of the Jewish dispensation, and now assumed by *Christ*, without any reference had to any greater and higher than himself, convinceth me, that if He is but a mere man like ourselves, he must have been the most notorious blasphemer that ever existed, and that the Jews are in the right, to deny him with a scornful rejection.

But although the manner in which the apostles speak of their Master, and what he says of himself in the book of Revelation, may fully justify the moderns in their rejecting of him, it cannot be urged as a plea for the ancient Jews, who crucified Christ before any of those books were written. It may therefore be proper to inquire into the grounds of their judgment, and the propriety of their conduct, from the ministry of Christ himself.*

To enter upon a formal process against *Jesus of Nazareth*, the idol of the Orthodox, to speak in the language of some rational divines; be it observed, that the

1. Charge against him is, "That he being not above thirty-three years of age, made the people believe that he existed before Abraham." The witness against him is, John viii. 56—58; "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I *am*." Your forced exposition of this passage, avails nothing in his defence. That he insinuated his own existence being prior to that of Abraham, is clear to a demonstration. And the Jews understood him according to the plain and obvious meaning of his words, therefore took up stones to have punished him for his arrogance in making himself older, and consequently greater than their *father Abraham*. If they mistook him, why did he not stay and clear up the mistake, instead of hiding himself, and getting privately away? This would have been charity becoming his pretensions to benevolence.

* I beg my readers never to lose sight of our leading supposition, "That Jesus Christ is no more than a man like ourselves; one who had no manner of existence prior to his being born of the Virgin:" for if you lose sight of this, you will take the writer to be either a Jew or a Mohammedan.

But he never attempted in any future discourse to set them right in this matter, consequently we conclude his intent was, that people should believe in him as older than Abraham; this is the least of what is implied in his declaration, especially if compared with his behaviour immediately upon it.

2. Although he had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin, he endeavoured to make the people believe, that he had been in heaven, that he came down from heaven, and was made flesh; all of which tended to make him be thought somewhat, at least, more than a man like ourselves. For proof of this charge, see John iii. 13; "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." That nothing short of a descending from heaven was intended, appears from verse 31; "He that cometh from above, is above all: he that cometh from heaven, is above all." Especially when compared with chap. xvi. 28; "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go unto the Father." If words have any meaning at all, Jesus could design no less than to persuade the people, that heaven was his residence prior to his incarnation; and in this light the apostles understood him, for they said, "Now speakest thou plainly, and not in parables." And Christ himself suffers them to continue in that same belief, without attempting to convince them that they had mistaken his meaning. And such has been the effect of these and such-like expressions of his, relative to his anti-incarnate state, that all who believe the New Testament to be the word of God, a few Arians and Socinians excepted, have uniformly believed in him as having existed from everlasting. But,

3. He gave his disciples room to consider him as omnipresent, and what is this but robbing the Deity of one of his essential perfections? Matt. xviii. 20. "For where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It will require great address to twist this passage into any other form, than that of a declaration of personal omnipresence.

Believers may be met in his name, at one and the same time, in every parish church and dissenting meeting-house in Britain and Ireland, or even in Europe, &c. and what

less than a presence universally diffusive, can be adequate to this engagement. Did it not therefore tend to mislead his followers into a notion that he could be present in many places at one and the same time? Or in other words, that he was possessed of a nature infinitely superior to mere humanity? Were we to hear the head of any party, encouraging his disciples to hope for his presence wherever they should assemble, would we not instantly conclude, either that he is a madman, or a designing villain? By parity of reason, the Jews had equal ground to be offended with Jesus Christ for such a manner of speaking, on supposition, that he hath no personal title to divine prerogatives.

Yet he is so far from relinquishing his pretensions, that even after they had punished his blasphemy with death, and he was risen from the dead, he repeats the promise with very considerable addition. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." So that there was promised not only the universal extent, but the perpetuity, of his presence. It is not my province to inquire, what possible sense may be imposed upon the words; the business of the law, in cases of high-treason, being only with the obvious meaning of what is spoken, and with the intent of the speaker. And surely it will require great art, to exculpate Jesus from the charge of making his disciples believe him to be every where present. Therefore, though shocking to speak it, the Jews did well in putting him to death for robbing the Deity. Yet the

4. Charge is still more gross, more highly aggravated than the former, for not content with distant allusions, he openly avows an equality with the Father, "I and the Father are One." This I noted before, as an instance of the ambiguity of his style in preaching; now I considered it as a charge of blasphemy which the Jews had against him, and which undoubtedly was such in the highest degree. My Father is greater than all, he says, and then adds, "I and the Father are One."* If he meant no more than, that he and the Father were One in will and design, might not the expletive easily have been added? How can he be justified in provoking the Jews, by using terms capable of being received in the most absolute sense, without at-

* The word *my* is a supplement.

tempting to explain his meaning? He even urges the propriety of his assertion, and for proof, adduces his unparalleled works. So that, consistently with sound reasoning, they could not have understood him otherwise than as making himself God. If it is replied in a way of excuse for him, "that in other places he expressly says, My Father is greater than I." The Jew may very justly retort upon us, "A sorry confession, indeed! for a man who is but of yesterday, to confess barely, that God is greater than him." Might you or I use even this expression, think you, consistently with a sense of the distance between the creature and the infinite Creator?

But Jesus seems even to have persuaded his disciples to believe in him, as identically the same with the Father, in respect to Essence. What less can be understood by what he says to Philip, John xiv. 8, 9, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us? Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long with you *and yet hast thou not known* me, *Philip?* He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou, Shew us the Father?" Surely no man could understand him as designing otherwise, than to represent himself as essentially One with the Father; which, for a mere man to do, is the most shocking of all blasphemy; and he that would do so, was undoubtedly worthy of death, the law of the Lord having denounced the sentence.

But that is not all, for he even suffered himself to be worshipped, and never reproved any worshipper for shewing him too much respect, which may serve as a

5. Charge against him in the eye of a Jew. You, indeed, have laboured to exculpate him from this charge; and have reduced this worship to such a state, as to mean no more than a fine bow or a courtesy means with us.

But, sir, it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Is worship here the same with what was paid to Jesus? If different, from whence do you gather your evidence? From the difference of expression, or otherwise? Not from the difference of expression. Therefore produce your warrant. Otherwise we shall still think, that suffering himself to be worshipped, was a crime worthy of death. Surely no man can easily misunderstand Thomas the apostle in his address to

Jesus, "My Lord, and my God;" which address was no way offensive, consequently Christ never reproves him, much less attempts to rectify his mistake.

How different was Mohammed's behaviour on a similar occasion, according to the testimony of *Al Beidowi!* Two Jewish Christians, named *Abu Rafe al Koradhi*, and *Al Seyid al Najrani*, came to Mohammed, and offered to worship him, and acknowledge him for their Lord: to which that zealous prophet answered, "God forbid, that we should worship any besides God." So far, indeed, was he from receiving worship, that he is said to have confessed himself a sinner, and to have asked pardon a hundred times a day, if his commentators deserve any credit.

These charges being summoned up in one, after the manner of British judges in their charge to the jury, would not any twelve men have brought him in guilty? consequently, the Jews and Pontius Pilate did nothing but an act of justice in putting him to death, in that open ignominious manner recorded in the sacred Scriptures.

From all that has been said, it is clear that the advantage is greatly on the side of the Mohammedan religion, and that its abettors have fewer difficulties to surmount, than those who glory in the name of rational Christians; but who may, at the same time, be treated as the most absurd of all enthusiasts; whilst the Trinitarians have the felicity of acting in a consistency with themselves as men of faith and religion, as well as with the dictates of revelation.

As it is a matter of no moment at all, whether Socinianism or the religion of Mohammed prevail, neither of them having the least connexion with real Christianity, which is the only religion taught in the word of God; I shall sum up, in one point of view, the reasoning of this and the former letters.

I have shewn, and perhaps with as much force of argument as you may heartily approve, that there is the most perfect agreement between the prophet Mohammed and yourself, respecting the doctrine of the One God, and that of the Trinity, and it will be very difficult to determine, whether you, or that Arabian, expresses most abhorrence of the Trinity. So that whether there be Three that bear

record in heaven or not, it is certain there are Two Men who bear the same testimony against that record.

Farther, that there is the most perfect harmony between Mohammed and you, respecting the person of Jesus, as but a man like yourselves—also in regard to his mission, as a prophet or a teacher sent from God. So that how irrational soever you may deem the orthodox, that prophet was at least as intelligent as yourself.

I have shewn, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more consistent prophet than David, Isaiah, and the rest of the Old Testament prophets—that he was even a better preacher than Christ and all his apostles—that he was more tender of the divine character, and more zealous for the glory of God than all the prophets; than Christ and all his apostles; consequently, that he gave better proof of the divinity of his mission, than Jesus gave of his. I have even shewn, that were your doctrine that of the Gospel, the world has received more extensive and more lasting advantages from Mohammed, than from all that Jesus Christ hath done and suffered. And to close the whole, I have demonstrated, that if the Lord Jesus be but a mere man like ourselves, he was an errant impostor, a notorious blasphemer, and as such, most justly condemned by the Jewish Sanhedrin, and still rejected by their offspring.

These conclusions, sir, dreadful as they are, naturally result from your scheme of doctrine. And is this what is obtruded upon us, under the character of rational religion? Boast no more, sir, of your superior reason, till you have rejected a scheme laden with such absurdity. To become Mohammedans at once, would be acting with propriety, for then you would have a consistent system, as to the point before us; but your present motley, heterogeneous, perplexed system, has, it is to be hoped, a natural, a necessary tendency to dissolution. Remember, however, that these things are not to be trifled with. And permit me to subscribe myself,

Reverend Sir,
Your humble servant,
J. MACGOWAN.

P. S. I am not at all solicitous about the time or manner of your answer, but shall consider myself at liberty to resume my pen, when any fresh attack is made on the doctrine of Christ's proper divinity, because if that falls, my hope must perish for ever.

N. B. Those who have time and inclination to consider the other articles treated of in your Appeal, will find every one of them equally big with absurdity.

Note. All the quotations from the *Koran*, are from the octavo edition, printed in 1764.

The quotations from the *Appeal*, from edition 2, with improvements, 1771, without a bookseller's name.

DISCOURSES

ON

THE BOOK OF RUTH,

AND

OTHER IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

PREFACE.

CHRISTIAN READER,

It is absolutely necessary that thou be firmly persuaded of the truth and excellency of the Christian Religion; *for this is thy life.*—The present is an age of infidelity—scepticism is arrived at its highest pitch—men, almost of every rank, have impudence and hardiness enough to attack the sacred Scriptures, and use every effort to sap the very foundation of our holy religion: their grand aim is to laugh religion out of the world; which, if they could effect, would be neither to their interest nor honour. The word of God is, notwithstanding all the scoffs, prejudice, and enmity of infidels, supported by the clearest and fullest evidence, and the highest authority. We find, in all ages, that the divinely-inspired Oracles have triumphed over all the power and policy of men and devils, making its way in opposition to the wisdom of philosophers, the arts of magicians, the will of princes, and all the temptations and terrors of the world. The kingdom of Christ, our great Redeemer, has, without force of arms, spread itself through the world, and that by the preaching of a few despised persons, several of them being unlearned fishermen. This demonstrates its original to be divine, and its protector Almighty. The real believer derives all his hopes, comfort, and salvation from this sacred and never-failing fountain—on the doctrines contained in the sacred pages, he is not ashamed to live, nor afraid to die.

Now, although all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, &c. and consequently claims our attention and belief; yet there are some parts that appear of more importance than others, and that on account of the prophecies which they contain; the historic facts which they relate; the wonderful providence which they display; the grace which they reveal, and the experience of the saints which they set before our eyes; and among these, the book of Ruth, which our Author has

taken for his subject, is not the least to be admired and esteemed: every one who reads with care and without prejudice, will find a fund of entertainment and instruction in that little piece of Holy Writ.

I have no inclination to prepossess the mind of the reader with opinions without conviction and examination. Let him pay all due attention to the doctrine contained in these Discourses, and the manner in which they are handled, and then judge for himself.

It may be expected that I should give an account of the part I have taken in this publication. I will tell the honest truth:

The writer, when in his last illness, intimated to his surviving relict, that he had gone as far as he was able in his design, in preparing for the press his Discourses on the Book of Ruth (for the publication of them was much upon his heart); and therefore he desired, that after his decease, the manuscript might be put into my hands, with a request to revise the copy, and superintend its publication.

With this request I complied, from motives of the most sincere friendship and esteem to the deceased, and a desire to promote the edification of many; especially the church and congregation of which he was pastor near fifteen years.

How far my attempts may have answered the wishes of the author's particular friends, and the expectation of the public, must be left to their decision—I hope for candour and impartiality—I shall be allowed to say, that in the prosecution of the office assigned me, I met with many difficulties, and that on account of the unfinished state of some parts of the copy. In order to supply that defect, I kept in view the author's main design, which was a practical improvement of the book of Ruth; and, as Mr. Christopher Ness, an ejected nonconformist minister of the last century,* was a favourite writer with him, I chose to follow his very entertaining method, in his judicious remarks upon that inspired part of Holy Scriptures. This may be seen in Discourse III.

Having got through that difficulty, we arrived at a more agreeable connexion, and found the path more smooth and pleasant.

Every one acquainted with the writings of Mr. Mac-

* See Christopher Ness's History and Mystery of the Old and New Testament.

gowan will easily discern his spirit and style in these Sermons. I am certain, that those who sat under his stated ministry will see in a moment the features of the original, and perhaps receive, in the publication of what they heard from the pulpit, a second benefit. Numbers of the dear man's hearers have expressed to me the unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction they received in the delivery of these Discourses.

It is not possible for an author to please all his readers —he must be a weak man who aims at, or expects it. If the critic is not gratified, sure I am the plain and humble Christian will—for such our author wrote, and happily succeeded ;—many having declared how greatly their souls were refreshed and edified by his writings, as well as by his ministry. For my own part, I am not ashamed to acknowledge; yea, I do it with pleasure, and gratitude to the great Author of every blessing, that Mr. Macgowan was one of the most valuable and improving companions I ever had the honour of an intimacy with. We visited often, and our conversation usually turned on important subjects, which proved very instructive to my own mind. The natural cheerfulness of his temper, the ease and familiarity with which he communicated his ideas, his great integrity, and unaffected piety, rendered him the pleasant companion, the amiable Christian, and the sincere friend : no one more sensibly felt the loss of him than myself.

I frequently visited him in his last sickness, when he took occasion, as opportunity offered, of opening to me his whole heart.

At one time he was in great darkness of soul, and lamented exceedingly the withdrawings of the presence of God. Two things, he said, had deeply exercised his thoughts. The one was, how those heavy and complicated afflictions which God had seen fit to lay upon him could work so as to promote his real good. And the other was, that God, his best friend, should keep at a distance from his soul, when he knew how much his mind was distressed for the light of his countenance.—" Oh !" said he, turning to me, and speaking with great earnestness, " my soul longeth and panteth for God, for the living God; his love visits would cheer my soul, and make this heavy affliction sit light upon me. The wonted presence of Jesus, my Redeemer, I cannot do without—I trust he will return to me

soon—yea, I know he will in his own time; for he knows how much I need the influence of his grace."—In this conversation, he often mentioned the depravity of his nature, and what a burden he found it—"My heart," said he, "is more and more vile—every day I have such humiliating views of heart-corruption as weighs me down—I wonder whether any of the Lord's people see things in the same light that I do."—And then turning to me, he said, "And do you find it so, my brother?" Upon my answering him in the affirmative, he replied, "I am glad of that."

The next time, which was the last of my conversing with him, I found him in a sweet and heavenly frame;—his countenance indicated the serenity of his mind. On my entering the room, he exclaimed, "O my dear brother, how rejoiced am I to see you!—sit down, and hear of the loving-kindness of my God. You see me as ill as I can be in this world, and as well as I can be whilst in the body. Methinks I have as much of heaven as I can hold."—Then tears of joy like a river flowed from his eyes; and his inward pleasurable frame interrupted his speech for a time. He broke silence with saying—"The work will soon be over—you see what you must soon experience—But death, to me, has nothing terrific in it—I have not an anxious thought—The will of God and my will are one—It is all right, yet mysterious—We are to part here; but we shall meet again.—You cannot conceive the pleasure I feel in this reflection, viz. that I have not shunned to declare (according to my light and ability) the whole counsel of God—I can die on the doctrines which I have preached—they are true—I find them so.—Go on to preach the Gospel of Christ, and mind not what the world may say of you."—All the while I sat silent; and rising up to take my leave, fearing he would spend his strength too much, he immediately took me by the hand, and weeping over each other, we wished mutual blessings. Upon parting, he said, "My dear brother, farewell—I shall see you no more."

Thus I left my much esteemed friend and brother; and the next news I heard of him was, that on the Saturday evening his immortal spirit left the body, to go to the world of light and bliss, and keep an eternal sabbath with God, angels, and saints.*

* Mr. Macgowan departed this life, Nov. 25, 1780, in the fifty-fifth year of his age.

Mr. Macgowan was well known in the world, and in the churches, both as a minister and an author. His several publications are standing proofs of his great abilities, and singular talents. He discovered a peculiarity of genius in the investigation of divine subjects; and, no doubt, some will object to the method of his treating the Book of Ruth, —That he has allegorized too much, and gone into topics that have no foundation in the history, &c. but to such objectors I would say—consult the Introduction.

With respect to the Discourses annexed to this work, I have only to observe, that some of the author's friends thought it advisable to print them, as there was a probability they would be acceptable, and a prospect of their being useful. I have some reason to believe that the two sermons on Joshua, &c. were designed for publication.

It is my sincere desire and fervent prayer, that this work may answer the labour and design of the excellent and pious writer; and that those who remain* in the ministry, may be like-minded with him in preaching the Gospel, defending the faith, and acting the Christian.

J. REYNOLDS.

Kingsland, June 8, 1781.

* The removal of faithful ministers from our world, must be sensibly felt and regretted by every friend to the interest of Christ, and the prosperity of Zion. It hath pleased the wise and sovereign Disposer of all events, to call away by death the Rev. John Conder, D. D. who was employed in a double capacity, that of a divinity tutor, and a pastor; which offices he filled up for a great number of years with honour to himself, satisfaction to his flock, and advantage to his pupils. He died on Wednesday, May 30, 1781, aged sixty-seven years.

TO THE

CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS

MEETING NEAR DEVONSHIRE SQUARE,

IN BISHOPSGATE STREET, LONDON.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

In a day in which few are found who delight in the purity of that Gospel, which reflects equal glory upon the works and ascribes equal dignity to the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, it is your unspeakable privilege to be reduced to the lowly obedience of faith, resting secure in the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.

In a day, when instead of adoring the person, trusting in the righteousness of Jesus, and deriving all supply from his inherent fulness, so many men of virtue, natural religion, and of eminent abilities, are straining every nerve to eclipse his personal glories, and bring into contempt his finished salvation; you cannot be thankful enough for that grace which has made you sensible of the plague of your own hearts, with your absolute helplessness, and indispensable need of an interest in Jesus in all that is his, so as to make you flee for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel. This you would have had neither power nor will to do, if the Holy Ghost had not breathed upon you, as of old upon the dry bones; and quickened you when dead in trespasses and sins.

Therefore by what principles soever others are influenced, you will find yourselves under the necessity of going on in an implicit dependance on the perfect obedience of Jesus, as the only spring of Christian holiness, seeing whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Thus called out of darkness into marvellous light, and constituted a church of the exalted Jesus; a church whose only rule of worship and discipline is the mind of God revealed in the sacred canon, exclusive of the capricious re-

turn of the unsteady on the one hand, and the lordly dictates of popish and prelatic arrogance on the other. This being the case, you must expect but little countenance from gentlemen whose uniform aim is to link the interests of Christ and the world together; rather expect that a great share of tribulation shall be yours; for were you to escape it, the Scriptures would denominate you bastards, and not sons and daughters.

You have indeed, as a church, been called to wade through seas of affliction, and to encounter mountains of difficulty; yet your spark has been kept alive amidst rolling billows; your bow has abode in strength, though galled by the masters of arrows your enemies. You have been helped to cleave to Jesus in his temptation, and have a Scripture warrant to look to him for the appointed kingdom. This He hath promised, and he was never known to forsake them who desired to follow him in the simplicity of his appointed ways, notwithstanding he willeth them to wait, and watch for his blessed coming.

Your trials, my friends, have been principally from those of your own communion; those who ought to have been helpers of your faith, and promoters of your joy; those who ate bread at your table have lifted up their heel against you, and, like Ahithophel of old, have turned their counsels against your tranquillity. But that unanimity in your judicatures, which God was pleased to give you in your greatest trials, has enabled you to surmount every difficulty. You have encouragement, therefore, still to persevere in following the simple dictates of revelation; for in so doing you shall be established as a church, against which even the gates of hell shall never prevail.

In this militant state, one trial passes away only to make way for another; so that there is no room to expect rest and ease of any long duration. This circumstance loudly calls for the closest attention to instituted means. In times of apparent safety, the mariners may take their rest; but in a storm, all hands must be active, as on activity of individuals the general good depends.

When you look back to the scenes of trouble through which you have been brought, the dangers which you have escaped, and reflect on your present situation, what reason of thankfulness to the great Keeper, by whom alone you

have been preserved. May you, may I, be helped still to go on, making the Holy One of Israel our only refuge in all our trials, and immovable foundation of our hope in the day of evil. Never forgetting that in a little while, those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy; who now groan under the cross, shall wear the crown, be where Jesus is, and behold that glory which he had with the Father before the world began; then shall all your sighs and groans be turned into hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

The following Discourses having been preached in your assembly, acceptable to most, and useful to many, when delivered from the pulpit, I dedicate to you as a token of that unfeigned esteem, and fervent regard I have for you as a church of our Redeemer. To you I willingly gave myself, and can truly say, that nothing under heaven could yield me more real pleasure than to see my poor attempts to serve you in the work of the ministry, made successful in the gathering into, and building up, the Church of the Lord in Devonshire Square.

I have been with you in much weakness, both in body and mind; in much fear and trembling, not so much for you as for myself, lest the Lord should humble me amongst you, by leaving me to myself. I dare not give you the least hope of its being otherwise in future, seeing I feel more, if possible, of the wretched depravity of a heart filled with enmity against the best of Beings, and by nature the seat of every vile affection. I feel a total incapacity of standing one moment of myself, much more so of being of any the least use to my hearers, without a divine blessing. Therefore I earnestly request, yea, I even covet, your prayers for me. And indeed, in proportion to the desire you have of my being useful among you, you must seek that usefulness from the Author of every good and perfect gift. The more frequent you go to the throne of grace in my behalf, and in behalf of one another, the more flourishing you shall be in your own souls, and the fruits of your prayers shall return into your own bosoms.

My proposed plan was to take a summary view of the whole history of Ruth, as it may be accommodated to Gospel purposes and principles. What led me to contemplate the subject, was a desire expressed by a much-esteemed friend, now in glory, to have a particular passage

of the history, which had been particularly useful to her, opened in the course of the ministry. What induced me to commit them to the press, was the more than ordinary impression which the sacred subject made for years upon my own mind, joined with the wish of many to have the whole in their own possession.

I am very far from considering the work as so much as verging towards perfection, or handled to that advantage which it might have had from another; but this I can say, I myself can go no farther in attempting to render it complete. But as I consider my time and talents your property, were the fruits of my meditations ever so valuable, they should with cheerfulness be devoted to your service; and such as they are, I doubt not but they will meet with your kind acceptance.

That the parental tenderness towards young inquirers, which Naomi discovered towards her Moabitish daughter-in-law, be ever manifested in your conduct as a church; and may you, with those holy women, find rest in the portion of Israel; that in your last days, songs of salvation may flow from your lips, and gratitude, for blessings received, warm every affectionate bosom.

I am, my very dear friends, your affectionate, though unworthy and sinful servant, and brother in the Gospel of Jesus,

JOHN MACGOWAN.

INTRODUCTION.

INTENDING, if Providence permits, to take a close view of the several parts of the history of Ruth and Boaz, and as far as may be consistent with the spirit of the text, apply it to Gospel purposes; it may not be amiss to make some general remarks by way of introduction.

1. As to the time when the incidents related in the book actually happened, which is fixed with precision in chap. i. 1. "In the days when the judges ruled;" but under which of the judges, the nicest inquirers have never been able to determine. Some think it was in the days of Ehud, and that Ruth was daughter to Eglon; which, if true, would give a greater lustre to the Spirit's work upon her soul in subduing her prejudices, which the untimely death of her father, by the hand of Ehud, might have occasioned; as well as to stoop to glean for her own and her mother's living, notwithstanding the dignity of her family.

Others suppose that this famine took place in Gideon's time, when the Midianites spoiled the land of Israel; and Josephus is for fixing it to the time of Eli's government. But I think that where the Holy Ghost is silent, it is rather daring to attempt an inquiry. And indeed it appears a matter of no great moment to us, if we can only make a proper improvement of its sacred contents. Nor does it appear more to our purpose, to be informed with certainty by which of the inspired penmen it was written. Whether Eli, Samuel, Gad, Nathan, or Ezra. It is enough that it is of the sacred canon, and referred to by the genealogists of our most holy Redeemer.

2. The leading scope and principal parts of the story, are objects more worthy of our present attention and serious regard. Its leading scope undoubtedly is to delineate the intermixture of the seed of the Gentiles with that of the Hebrews in the line of Jesus, ordained the Saviour of those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, in every age of the world. Mr. Roberts, in his Key to the Bible, observes,

That Ruth the Moabitish widow is inserted in the list of the Redeemer's ancestors by Matthew, one of his genealogists, well as Rachab, as being the first fruits of the Gentiles unto God. By thus taking his flesh of the seed of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, consistently with this natural union he becomes a light to enlighten the Gentiles, as well as to shew forth the glory of his people Israel; so that through him God is glorified in his spiritual Jacob, even to the ends of the earth; Gentile nations wait for his law, and rejoice in his salvation.

The same judicious writer observes farther, That if the book of Ruth was to be taken from the canon of Scripture, the genealogy of Jesus would be incomplete; the whole of the Old Testament, without its assistance, being insufficient to give proper evidence of his Messiahship; so that it is of the utmost consequence to the cause of Christianity, and absolutely necessary to Gospel faith.

This remark, made by an author for whom I have the highest esteem, an author who devoted his time and talents to the service of the believing church, was one, amongst other motives, which inclined me to take its contents into closer consideration than I had done before; concluding that, if the Holy Ghost has seen meet to make the book of Ruth necessary to the establishment of Christianity, I should find it fertile of profitable matter, and very capable of a practicable improvement.

It is not proposed to inquire into the propriety of their sentiments who embrace this pleasing history under the notion of veiled and figurative Gospel, nor to censure such who consider it as no more than a history, having no designed allusion to the Gospel of grace. Every man claims a right of thinking and judging for himself, and I shall claim no more than the same privilege.

Those who consider the book of Ruth, as no way adumbrative of Gospel mystery, but merely historical, cannot consistently be offended with an attempt to accommodate even history itself to the illustration of Gospel truth, seeing that "whatsoever was written aforetime, was written for our instruction, that we through comfort of the Scriptures may have hope." On the other hand, those who consider Ruth as Gospel veiled, or hidden under the figures of personal types, ought not to blame, if I choose to accommo-

date it historically, rather than to read it typically, as I am obliged to do some other parts of Holy Scripture. My intention is, to enjoy my own free liberty, and to give full license to excursions of thought, without designing the least offence to any man, how widely soever he may differ from me in opinion.

Before I enter particularly into an improvement of the subject, it may not be amiss to set before you, in one general view, its principal parts, by way of analysis, especially as it may be some help to the memory.

The first thing recorded is Elimelech's departure from the land of Israel, on account of the famine, to seek food for himself and family in the land of Moab—there his two sons Mahlon and Chilion were married, the one to Ruth and the other to Orpah, both daughters of Moab—there, in this land of strangers, Elimelech died, and was buried—his death was succeeded by that of both his sons—Naomi hearing that the Lord had visited Israel with plenty, resolved to return to her country and kindred—her tender parting with Orpah, and Ruth's inseparable attachment to her in all her afflictions—their arrival at Bethlehem-Judah, and reception by the kindred of Elimelech—the bitterness of her sorrows on viewing the scenes of past endearments.

Boaz is described in his name—family—in his calling as a husbandman—in the affluence of his temporal circumstances, and piety of his conversation.—Ruth is described, in the humility of her spirit—her industry in her lowly employment as a gleaner—her dutiful regard and implicit obedience to her mother-in-law. Naomi's maternal care for her daughter's welfare—her wise directions, by which the desired marriage was brought about.—The tenderness of Boaz to her, and his full justification of her conduct and kindness.

The public settlement of matters, between Boaz and the nearer kinsman, as preliminaries necessary to the intended marriage—Ruth's public espousals to this honourable Israelite—the blessing of the elders upon them both after their marriage—her conception, and deliverance of Obed, David's grandfather—congratulations paid to Naomi, this venerable mother in Israel, on this joyful occasion.

From this short sketch of the history we may learn,

(1.) That no state is so bad, no circumstances so dark

and dismal, as to be considered hopeless. Naomi and Ruth were both in circumstances to the utmost distressing, before the day of prosperity began so much as to dawn upon them. Yet their darkness was but for a night, and the smiling morning brought a train of pleasurss to their possession. The waters of Marah were dried up, and the streams of Shiloh flowed abundantly; so that after all their bitterness of spirit, those desolate widows sang songs of salvation. Let us then look up in hope, even when the darkest cloud is drawn over our tabernacle, when we are called to drink most deeply of the wormwood and the gall, seeing it is only preparatory to the cry of salvation; a ruffling storm before you enter into the undisturbed rest of the sanctified. The smoking furnace of trying temptations usually precedes the smiling lamp of Gospel consolation.

(2.) We learn hence, That no man serveth God for nought; or, as our blessed Redeemer expresses it, "That no man forsaketh father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands, for his sake, but who shall receive a hundred fold even in this life, as well as eternal bliss in the world to come." Ruth left all and clave to her mother-in-law, and by so doing was reduced to the lowest degree of indigence; but she emerged from her distresses, and affluence succeeded her penury. Instead of the enjoyment of her native idols and connexions, her name is recorded in the annals of heaven. Fear it not, my dear friends,—never fear that God will let you be losers, by cleaving to his people in the day of their visitation; or by taking up any, were it even the heaviest cross upon his account.—Ruth received a hundred fold even in this world; a hundred fold is promised to all in like circumstances; promised by the Truth himself, our ever faithful Redeemer.

(3.) In the case of Orpah, we see that a high degree of natural virtue may be lost for want of divine religion. You hear her lift up her voice and weep at parting with her mother-in-law; but at the same time, you see her return back to her idols and pagan connexions. Her conduct displayed her duty and filial affection in an eminent degree, but not the least inclination to come and put her trust in Jacob's Jehovah. How sad is their state who are governed solely by education principles, and have no higher dependance than mere refined nature! Orpah is not alone in this

predicament; there is much reason to fear, it is the case with but too many of our contemporaries. God grant it may not be ours! It is not the holding on a great way with Orpah, but holding out to the end, which evidences the reality of religion; for he only that endures to the end shall be saved. The Orpahs, the stony ground hearers, and half-hearted scribes, shall never sing of salvation within the tents of Jehovah's Israel.

I would now recommend it to you, narrowly to mark the principal characters in the history, as we pass on in its illustration, and endeavour to make them your own, by copying their excellencies, which are truly eminent; and even from Orpah, learn this lesson, that the soul who draweth back is displeasing to Jesus.

BOAZ AND RUTH.

DISCOURSE I.

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land; and a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah, and they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.—Ruth i. 1, 2.

As it is not my intention to study method so much, as to draw forth the practical part of the history to view, I shall take the passage, in its several clauses, as it lies before us; which, for ought I know, may be the most ancient, as well as the most useful method of preaching, because of its plainness and simplicity. And as I have no other object in view but the glory of God in our common salvation, I am no way careful what the critical hearer may think of the abilities of the preacher. Yea, in submitting the discourses to public inspection, I am equally indifferent on that head, as I have not the least hope of their being so much as read by any besides the truly serious, the lovers of Jesus, and him crucified; and I would hope that I am now, at this time, equally insensible to popular applause or censure, if the grand end I have in view be but answered in opening the history. The

First clause of which is, "Now it came to pass;"—not by chance, or by any combination or fortuitous events, but by the special hand of an all-ruling and divine Providence, which is the counterpart of the divine decree, or an exposition of the hidden things of infinite wisdom. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" The times and the seasons, the earth and the clouds, the winds and the rains, are all under his awful controul; so that plenty or famine, are solely by his appointment. And how should it be otherwise, seeing the life of a sparrow, the

dinner of a raven, and even the very hairs on our heads, are under his direction, care, and government? To profit by what you read, or hear, it is necessary that you should mark well what comes to pass, in the course of divine Providence; for, says the Psalmist, Psal. cvii. 43. "Whoso is wise, will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord." Here, the exercise of true wisdom is made to consist in the marking of those things; and undoubtedly that person who treasures up his own experience under the various dispensations of Providence, has, as it were, a body of divinity within himself, and best knows how to live upon the loving kindness of the Lord, even in seasons of the greatest difficulty, and of the deepest distress.

II. "In the days when the judges ruled."—It was observed in the Introduction, that the Holy Ghost is silent with respect to which of the judges it was who then governed Israel, which consequently precludes any inquiry; but be he whomsoever he might, during his government there was,

III. "A famine in the land."—For the fertility of its soil, the land of Canaan was said to flow with milk and honey, notwithstanding which it was subject to famine, as both Abraham, and his grandson Jacob experienced; and at this time the famine was so great in this land of plenty, that it reached even Bethlehem, the house of bread itself. But was there not a cause? Doth the Lord afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men without provocation? No; but he may justly turn a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them who dwell therein.* Indeed, through the whole of sacred history, we find that judgment upon Israel was always preceded by their having done evil in the sight of the Holy One; and their deliverance as constantly followed their repentance and making their supplications to him.

What, then, has Great Britain to fear? Britain, the far greater part of whose inhabitants live as if there were no God, no future judgment, no eternal world, though favoured with higher privileges than are enjoyed by any nation under heaven. Is there not reason to fear, that in the day of visitation, the height of our privileges may make our condem-

* Psal. cvii. 34.

nation the more emphatical, and the judgment of Capernaum be our reward as a people? When the sins of Judah arose to a certain height of aggravation, the God who made the people would shew them no mercy; but laughed at their calamity, and mocked when their fears came upon them. So, in the present case, the presence of even the godly in the land, could not avert the famine, which affected the opulent themselves; for,

IV. "A certain man, of Bethlehem-Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab."—A clear and striking proof that here is no continuing city or place of abode; and shews the necessity of our seeking a city which hath foundations, the builder and maker of which is God. For if a man is ever so agreeably situated in the midst of plenty, divine Providence can soon drive him from his rest, and reduce him to the disagreeable necessity of depending upon the bounty of even the wicked themselves, who are, like Moab, for ever shut out from the sanctuary of Jehovah. This should teach us to guard against security, not to be high-minded, but to fear, and trust in the name of the Lord.

How sovereign are the dispensations of Holy Providence! Whilst blessed Jacob and his family were in danger of perishing with hunger, corn abounded in the land of accursed Egypt. So, meagre famine spared not even Bethlehem-Judah, whilst the offspring of an incestuous embrace had not only bread enough for themselves, but also wherewithal to supply the wants of others in their necessity. From whence it appears that wicked people may sometimes abound in affluence, while the godly experience the trials of penury, as is indeed apparently the case in numberless instances. This evinceth the truth of Solomon's doctrine, Eccl. ix. 1. "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them;" consequently, they err exceedingly who consider their prosperity as an evidence of their interest in special favour; and equally wrong it is, to draw uncomfortable conclusions from circumstances of distress and penury. Cursed Moab had plenty, whilst the chosen race were pining in famine. Jeremiah says, chap. xlviii. 11. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed."

The case with Moab was simply this: He remained in an unchanged, unregenerated state; his taste for earthly enjoyments, and sensual gratifications, remained entire in him. Earth was the object of his pursuit: earth was his only God. His scent of sinful pleasures, forbidden lusts of the flesh and of the eye, continued still the same. He was never led into captivity, to feel the galling chains of his own iniquity, and to know himself, to be a slave to his own lusts, and a very drudge of Satan. He was never convinced that he was held, and by the righteous law, to fulfil its tenor to the utmost perfection, or bear its penalty in the fullest extent of its rigour; the consequence of which was, he settled upon his lees, enjoyed the fatal rest of carnal security, and went on frowardly in the way of his own choice. Nor did the Almighty think it worth his while to pour him from vessel to vessel, as he doth his own people Israel. Woe be to them that are at ease; but blessed is that man who endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life.

This man, though driven by famine from his own land, and from the inheritance of his God, had no intention of making the land of Moab his home, but went merely to sojourn there, till the Lord should visit Israel again with plenty. An Israelite indeed, will find his dwelling in Moab to be as uncomfortable as Lot's was amongst the people of Sodom. What the philosopher said concerning Athens, will apply in the present case, "It is a pleasant place to pass through, but unsafe to dwell in." Moab might be very well for a temporary sojournment, but would by no means do for a settled habitation.

Let Moab for once symbolize the world, and it will still apply. Here are many blessings to be enjoyed; many excellencies to be viewed; and, so far as we can trace the operations of a God unsullied, every scene is delightful. But where is the saint who would choose the world for his eternal habitation? Where that believer, who would not choose strangling, rather than to be condemned to live for ever in the present state of existence? Yet it is very well to pass through, on our journey to the land of true felicity. The bitterness of time, will make the rest of eternity the more delightful.

V. "Him, and his wife, and two sons."—This shews do-

mestic union in the midst of the greatest distress, and that nothing whatever should separate those whom God hath joined together, either by the ties of nature, or the bonds of sacred marriage. They had lived together, and could not part: rather than part, they resolved to share a like fate at home or abroad. This strongly reproves those husbands and wives who aim at separate interests, or seek different scenes of pleasure; or who indeed can willingly be parted, by any thing short of dissolution. What numbers then must fall under rebuke in this degenerate age! This domestic complacency in Elimelech's family, equally reproves those worse than brutal parents, who discover a neglect of their offspring, respecting either the present or future life. The very tigress fostereth her young with maternal tenderness; and the helpless hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and exerts the full extent of her feeble powers in their defence. Yet some parents, sunk beneath the brutes, by idleness, intemperance, and extravagance, make war upon the happiness of their own offspring. But let every such parent know, that he who provideth not for his own family, especially those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

VI. "The name of the man was Elimelech."—"My God is king," a fit name to give consolation in the deepest distress, for he could not even so much as reflect upon it, without being reminded that the Almighty is Governor of the universe, and consequently, that whatsoever takes place under heaven, is either by express ordination, or by special permission; therefore this famine was to be considered as an evil of the Lord's sending. A sight of the divine hand in afflictions, sending, proportioning, and over-ruling them, greatly tends to reconcile the mind to the dispensation. It was this which made good old Eli, on receiving the awful message which foretold the final extirpation of his progeny, not from the priesthood only, but from the earth itself, calmly, though doubtless with a griefful heart, to reply, "It is the Lord, let him do whatsoever he pleaseth." As if he had said, I receive the message as from my God; I know I am guilty with regard to my sons, and fall under his just rebuke. But he is God, and will not do wrong; Jehovah, and cannot err in judgment. Let him therefore do what seemeth good unto him.

It was a custom with the ancients, not unworthy of modern imitation, to give significant names to their children, such names as should be standing memorials of certain mercies received. Hence Rachel named Bilhah's son, born upon her own knees, after a long season of personal barrenness, Dan, which signifies *judging;* because, as she said, God had judged her, and heard her voice.* How much soever her conduct, in giving her handmaid to her husband, may be deemed reprehensible, her fixing a memorial of prayer being heard, was laudable and worthy of imitation.

The first three names given unto man, are so significant as to make a very important sentence. Adam, Earth; Cain, Possession; Abel, Vanity; which may very properly be rendered, "Earthly possessions are vanity." I pretend not to say, whether the imposition of those names was by the spirit of prophecy, or merely what we call accidental, farther than observing that the first was given by God himself, and is suitable to all the race of mankind; therefore it is lawful to infer a possibility of the other names being given, some how, under the direction of influence from above.

The import of Elimelech's name, if impressed upon his heart, must necessarily comfort him in his removal from Bethlehem to the country of Moab, when he reflected that his God was King even in the land of strangers. How happy must that man be whose God is King! he may be

* Godly parents do well, when they give such names to their children as may be memorials of the providence of God towards them.—See the history and changes of Joseph's life epitomized, Psal. cv. 17—20, &c. Now after this turn in his affairs, we are told that he had two sons in the land of Egypt; but what were their names? The text answers; Gen. xli. 51, 52, He called the name of his first born Manasseh, which signifies forgetfulness; and he giveth the reason for it; for, saith he, "God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim, which signifieth fruitful; for, said he, God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." He was once very much afflicted, and now he was very fruitful; therefore he called the name of his younger son Ephraim, that he might remember the kindness of God to him, as often as he beheld, or spake to, or of, that son. "So Moses called his son Gershom (stranger), for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land," Exod. xii. 22. We find names also given to things, as well as to persons, by way of remembrance. Thus, 1 Sam. vii. 12, after a great victory obtained against the Philistines, Samuel set up a stone and gave it a name, he called it Eben-ezer, or the stone of help: the reason was, for, said he, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us." The name of the stone was to mind them of the Lord's constant readiness to help them in every strait, and to work salvation for his church to the end of time. So Moses, Exod. xvii. after that great deliverance from the Amalekites, built an altar, and called it Jehovah-nissi, which signifieth, the Lord is my banner, to put them in remembrance how the Lord went forth as a man of war, and mightily confounded their enemies. *See Caryl on Job.*

driven by famine, by persecution, or otherwise, far from the house of his God; yet he can never be banished to any place, but where God is his King. Every Christian, every regenerated person, may be called Elimelech, and he may justly say either in a church assembly, on the Exchange, of elsewhere; yea, even on a sick or dying bed; in a dungeon, or at the stake, "MY GOD IS KING." May we not then say, with the Psalmist, "Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord, and whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance."

VII. The name of the woman is next to be considered; Naomi, *My sweet or pleasant one.* What every woman ought to study to be to her own proper husband; therefore there ought to be no forced marriages, let the seeming advantages be ever so great; for how is it possible for a woman to study to render herself sweet and pleasant in the eye of a man for whom she has no particular affection? In such a case, bare civility is as much as a man can expect, and even that must be a force upon her inclination. It is difficult to say who acts the most absurd part, the parent who compels his daughter against her wish and desire, or the man who receives a hand known to be given with reluctance.

Every man ought to esteem his wife as his Naomi, his sweet and pleasant one, seeing that in marriage she has sacrificed her all, conscience excepted, to the will and power of her husband, and now looks up to him as her earthly all. Indeed so near is the relation, that she not only lieth in, but actually is the wife of his bosom, Deut. xiii. 6; and ought to be as dear to him as the heart that dwells therein. To shew the impossibility of a relation more near, it is expressly said of man and wife, that they are no longer twain but one flesh, bone of each other's bone, and flesh of each other's flesh.

The husband may indeed assume a kind of pre-eminence, from the consideration that his wife is but the weaker vessel; but this very pre-eminence of his, ought to be turned to her consolation. Is she the weaker vessel? does it not then become his duty to overlook her weaknesses and infirmities? Is she his sweet and pleasant one? will he not then make it one great part of the business of his life to nourish her, and

render her comfortable? happy the man who is Elimelech, and the woman who is Naomi.

The believing church is Christ's Naomi, his sweet and pleasant one, and he is her Elimelech, her God the King. For her he forsook the mansions of plenty and delight—with her he sojourned in a Moabitish world, amongst enemies to the God of Israel—there he died an accursed death to accomplish her salvation—there he was buried to purify the grave for her use—rose again to trample on all her enemies; and is now gone to Bethlehem, the house of bread, to prepare a place for his Naomi, on her arrival from the land of Moab.

The love of husbands to their wives, when genuine, is symbolical of the love of Jesus to his church, deep, steady, and uniform, not like the flighty fits of lust after a harlot. Hence Paul exhorts husbands, "Love your wives even as Christ loved his church;"—a better example for imitation he could not possibly propose.

Isaac's love to Rebekah as recorded, Gen. xxiv. 67, is worthy of our observation: "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her." First, he put her in possession of his mother's tent, with all its appurtenances; then he owned her and treated her as his wife; lastly, he loved her with an increasing love. All of which is typical of the conduct of Christ towards the Jewish and Gentile churches. Dead Sarah was a solemn figure of the former church, when her children made void the commandment to establish their own traditions; and especially when her law of ceremonies was completely abrogated, and her outward pomp departed; more especially still, when her very place and city were taken away by the victorious Romans.

Young Rebekah, who came from a far country, and was put into possession of all that belonged to Sarah, is a striking figure of the Gentile church, which being called from every nation, people, kindred, tongue, and language, is put into possession of the substance of what the Jewish church enjoyed only the shadow. And having thus loved his own, who were in the world, he loveth them to the end.

VIII. The names of their two sons were Mahlon and

Chilion, both significant, and seemingly prophetic of part of this history.

Mahlon, "a song, infirmity." A song, in the early days of espousal love and domestic prosperity; infirmity, prophetic of the sad events which afterwards took place. Chilion, "finished," as both father and children were, in almost the opening of this history, and which every thing under the sun must eventually be.

Elimelech's conduct and end were represented in the names of his two sons. It was great infirmity in him to leave the promised land, to leave even Bethlehem, the house of bread, for fear of the famine, seeing the word is, "Dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed;" but outward appearances being so strong against the promise, the weakness of his faith could not surmount the difficulty. No wonder, for the famine drove even Abraham himself from Canaan to Egypt, for which he had likely to have paid very severely in the loss or pollution of his beloved Sarah. We may truly say, Lord, what is man when left to himself? There is such a thing as fleeing from a lion, and being met by a bear; so Elimelech fled from the famine, and met with certain death in a land of strangers. It is good in every case to have the word, the counsel of God, for the rule of our conduct.

The history of the two brothers seems to be involved in their very names, Mahlon and Chilion. From infirmity they both finished their lives in Moab, and with their father made their graves in a strange land. Both were men of infirmity, and both finished their course in Moab. These names are written upon all flesh; numberless infirmities, both natural and moral, cleave to the best of men. Paul had his thorn in the flesh, Timothy his often infirmities, and the church in general her great tribulations to endure. Moreover, all are hastening to finish their course with Chilion. Good and bad, rich and poor, gracious and profane, are posting towards the house of silence, where there is neither work nor device.

IX. They were Ephrathites of Judah, a name of honourable distinction, Micah v. 2. "Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from

of old, even from everlasting." So that Jesus, the son of God, was himself an Ephrathite of Judah.

Seeing there was an indelible enmity in the hearts of the Moabites against Israel, it may be asked, How it came to pass that those Ephrathites should not only be permitted to sojourn peacefully among them, for the space of ten years, but also during the whole time to have their wants supplied?

To which we have this encouraging answer. In the time of their distressing exile, God speaketh for his banished people in the very hearts of their enemies: so that it does not suppose the removal of the enmity, but the control which the Almighty has over the will and inclinations of his people's enemies. In Jer. xv. 11. we have this promise: "Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction." Enemies still, although instrumental for good to the afflicted saint; and although enemies, under the absolute control of the God of Israel. An excellent divine* thus paraphrases the promise; "If I do not effectually intercede for thee with the enemies of whom thou art afraid, never trust in me more." The kind treatment which Jeremiah met with from the Chaldean general Nebuzaradan, was neither less nor more than the fulfilment of this gracious promise.

As the banished ones must both sojourn and be fed in Moab during their exile, we learn, that how dark soever the circumstances of the righteous may be, they shall never be forsaken. He was with Israel in Egypt for their redemption, with the three faithful Hebrews in the furnace, with Daniel in the den of lions; and will be with his needy people to the end of the world. So that although they may be persecuted, they shall not be forsaken; may be cast down, they shall not be destroyed.* The Scripture contains not one promise that we shall be exempted from affliction and temptation, but it abounds with promises of support under, deliverance from, and conquest over; "for in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

* Mr. Ness in his History and Mystery of the Bible. † 2 Cor. iv. 9.

DISCOURSE II.

THE CASE OF THE WIDOW AND FATHERLESS CONSIDERED.

And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons, and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab; for she had heard in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her: and they went on the way to return into the land of Judah.—Ruth i. 3—7.

In opening this passage, three heads of discourse offer to consideration.

I. The state of the widow and fatherless.

II. The marriage of the two sons contrary to the law of God.

III. Naomi's return into the land of Judah, which God had again visited with plenty.

I. The case of the widow and fatherless. The husband died, and the woman was left.

Death in any, even in the mildest form, hath something in it not only awful, but tremendous to nature. Even a Cato, when he found himself, as he thought, under a necessity of dying that he might not see the slavery of his people, could not without painful reflections venture upon an untried state of existence. But when the awful skeleton creeps into the bed of a man, and takes away the desire of his eyes with a stroke of death, at once bereaving him of the comfort afforded by a bosom companion, and entailing upon him more than a double charge, the dispensation becomes truly affecting. Yet none are exempted from circumstances of this nature—none are married longer than death shall them part. The fondest couple must part,

though linked in the bonds of holy matrimony. And oh! sad the parting to hearts united! But it must be, the decree is gone forth, "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." Remember, ye who doat most upon one another, that notwithstanding your present enjoyments and pleasure, you must part also; you hold your pleasures by a tenure to you very uncertain, but at last your union must be finished by a separation; and oh! that you may be united in soul, in heart, and affection, in the pure world of spirits.

Some of God's people have been thus visited under circumstances of peculiar aggravation. Ezekiel must part with the desire of his eyes, and is denied the poor consolation of mourning for his loss. Chap. xxiv. 16, 17; "Son of man, behold I will take away the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down: forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead," &c. His wife was the desire of his eyes, what every wife ought to be to her husband. Though Ezekiel was the prophet of God, he could not be screened from the stroke of affliction. The injunction laid upon him not to mourn seemed to be an infringement of the laws of common decency, even in a person of private life: but here the prophet of God is, by divine authority, laid under the necessity of violating the rules of civil decorum. Lose a beloved wife, and not be permitted to mourn over her! How hard the case, says nature; but grace replies, it is the command of a covenant God, and shall be obeyed.

Ezekiel's case was undoubtedly trying, but it is still more hard and heavy when death, as in Naomi's case, bereaves a woman of her husband, and devolves upon her a multiplicity of cares in training up a fatherless offspring. The state of widowhood is, in society in general, considered as a very disadvantageous state, which changes Naomi into Marah, and for the most part attended with many miseries. You may well remember that the woman of Tekoah made use of it as a plea to win David's attention, "I am indeed a widow, and my husband is dead." The word Almonah which we render widow, signifies dumb, the head being gone; and hence it is that the Scriptures so often, and so strongly recommend their cases to the consideration of judges, because the needy are frequently

the subjects of oppression. But let the widow indeed remember, that if she herself is Almonah, dumb, she shall see a pleader rise in her behalf who speaks as never man spake, even our great High Priest who speaks well, and whom the Father heareth always. Widows indeed, are honourably described, 1 Tim. v. 5. "Now she that is a widow indeed, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayer night and day." How different these from those whom the apostle describes, by saying, they will wax wanton and marry?

Whilst your husbands lived, you looked up to them in a way of dependance; now they are removed from your head, there is none but the Lord on whom you can rely. On him you may safely depend so long as you read that precious passage, Isa. liv. 5. "Thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord of hosts is his name." In him you shall find a wise director, a powerful protector, and a bountiful provider, who will never forsake you in the hour of your necessity. When one reads 1 Kings vii. 14, it gives great encouragement to comply with that injunction, Jer. iv. 11, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me:" for the great Tyrian artist who built the temple in Solomon's days was the son of a widow, of which circumstance the Holy Ghost makes particular mention. "And king Solomon sent, and fetched Hiram out of Tyre; he was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass: and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass." This was undoubtedly intended for the encouragement of other widows to bring their fatherless children, and commit them to him who alone can do them essential service.

Of all widows, we read of none whose case was more to be deplored than that of good Naomi. Banished by famine from the house of God, and the inheritance of her fathers, bereaved of her husband in an enemy's country, having two sons to educate in the midst of idolatry; and more especially, when her two sons themselves were taken away, and two young widows were added to her burden. Yet by those things, so grievous for her to bear, infinite wisdom was only bringing about the great end originally in view, the salvation of the ends of the earth; and after being thus tried in the furnace of affliction, her faith being

found unto praise, she became the honoured nurse of one of the ancestors of Jesus.

A fatherless condition is also a state of misery, and exposed to many disadvantages; and is therefore joined with the widow everywhere in Scripture, both in point of mystery of the divine paternal care, and encouragement to trust in the goodness of a covenant God. You who are fatherless, may derive much consolation in contemplation of that passage, Exod. xxii. 22. "Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in anywise, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry." To afflict the widow and fatherless any way, or in any degree whatever, rouseth the jealousy of a God; nor is it necessary that they should have the eloquence of an Aaron to engage him in their cause; for if they cry at all, though in language ever so broken, and in petitions ever so imperfect, the Lord will hear, yea, he will surely hear their cry, and retaliate upon their oppressors.

The fatherless are often neglected by man, but they are the declared objects of heavenly regard, and it is frequently enjoined upon those in power not to oppress them or the widow. You therefore who are forsaken of both father and mother, are particularly called to put all your trust in your heavenly Parent. You may say with David, Psal. xxvii. 10; "When father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." He even glories in his near relation to you, and encourages your hope and trust in him as such; Psal. lxviii. 5, "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." Yea, to visit the widow and the fatherless is one part of true and undefiled religion. These considerations tend to soften the aspect of the most gloomy dispensations, and open a door of hope to every Naomi.

II. The marriage of her two sons to the daughters of Moab, contrary to the laws of the Lord, comes under consideration.

"They took them wives."—It does not appear that the godly mother had any hand at all in the matter, but rather that they acted uninfluenced by any. Nor was the taking of them wives simply considered at all reprehensible, but rather a favourable event, as thereby the loss of one creature comfort was supplied by the enjoyment of another. They had lost their father, and took unto them wives, for

whom both father and mother ought to be forsaken, and who ought to be abode by in every circumstance. It was thus that Isaac was comforted after the death of his mother: he lost Sarah the mother, and found a help meet in Rebekah. May we venture to use this as adumbrative of Christ and his church? The Jewish church he possessed for many hundreds of years; at last the glory and life departed, and Jehabod was written upon her gates: but he embraced the Gentile church and was comforted, saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied.

Under the most trying dispensations, and the very greatest of losses, the believer may say, "Although I have lost the gift, I have not lost the Giver." The Author of every perfect gift is still my own; my own God and my Saviour: if all my outward comforts were gone, the well from whence I draw consolation can never be dried up. If they were all withdrawn, I have fresh and lively comforts in the living God; the God of all comfort, and Father of all mercies; 2 Cor. i. 3, "Blessed be God the Father of all mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation." The apostle's eye was unto none but God for comfort. He that is in tribulation he can comfort, and declares that in all tribulation he doth comfort. On which observe, that God is the spring of all comfort; true consolation comes from him alone: the creature may yield comfort, but it is like the apples fabled by the poets, beautiful without, but stuffed with ashes and cinders within; but that which is from above is pure and undefiled.

It is he that bestows all kinds of comforts, whether natural or spiritual, for time and for eternity, as well as comforts of every degree. It is he begets all our mercies for us, and ever lives to beget new mercies when the old ones are taken away.

But these marriages, taken in a moral view, yield reflections of a very different nature. "They took unto them wives of the women of Moab." Here was a grievous departure from the law of their God, which law excluded strangers from the house of the Lord for ever. And surely those who are excluded from the holy congregation, ought never to be taken from the bosom of an Israelite. The law in Exod. xxxiv. forbids the Hebrews to make any covenant at all with the nations; and behold, Naomi's sons enter into the very nearest of all relations with strange women!

Yet God may, in his infinite wisdom, so over-rule the evil actions of men, as to bring about by them the designs of his grace, never once thought on by the perpetrators themselves. No greater evil could ever be committed than to murder the Lord of glory, yet by this very evil was the redemption of the world accomplished. In like manner, notwithstanding the above marriage was in itself unlawful, it was so over-ruled as to become subservient to the salvation of the Gentiles.

However, this gives no license to any man to act contrary to the revealed will of God, which standeth fast for ever, and expressly enjoins all believers to the strictest obedience. The injunction is, 2 Cor. vi. 14; "Be not ye unequally yoked with unbelievers." The reasons for it follow: "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

According to the law, a man ought not to plough with an ox and an ass in the same yoke, nor so much as wear a garment of linen and woollen; and whoever departs from the direction given by the Holy Ghost in point of marriage, shall be a sufferer in his own soul. It was Solomon's foible to be attached to strange women, and the consequence was, they drew away his heart from his God. All his wisdom was not equal to their allurements. Let others, therefore, beware of connexions so dangerous. Happy had it been for Sampson had he foreseen the danger of any intercourse with Delilah. Then would he have retained his eyes, and his strength; would have continued the terror of the Philistines, and the boast of his own people Israel.

These considerations ought to teach us to guard against all carnal connexions, for it is difficult to take fire into the bosom without being burned, or to touch pitch without being defiled. If the strength of Sampson, and the wisdom of Solomon, could not preserve them, we surely can have no reason to hope being more successful.

The preceding verse strongly verifies the Psalmist's declaration, Psal. xxxiv. 19; "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Here was loss upon loss, trial upon trial. First, the husband died, and was buried in a strange land; secondly, the sons

married strange women, the daughters of an accursed race, and enemies unto Israel; and, thirdly, the sons themselves are taken away by death in an early life, without being permitted to visit their paternal inheritance: so that the woman was emptied indeed. We are told that God afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men for their hurt; and yet, that, "whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." One son, and only one he had, who never sinned, but not without suffering; sinless Jesus was the greatest sufferer of the race of mankind, and yet the Holy One of Israel, the only Begotten of the Father, and the immaculate Redeemer of the election of grace, which was indispensably necessary to our salvation.

From what we read of the afflictions of others, we are taught that our cases are by no means singular, even when our griefs are complicated. What did Israel, the elect of God, undergo in Egypt, that house of bondage! what did Naomi endure in the land of Moab? and what is the general character of Jesus himself, but a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?"

III. We come now to treat of Naomi's return into the land of Judah; in which we shall accompany her, making the following familiar remarks as we go along.

After being as it were buried in Moab for the space of ten years, this Mother in Israel, in the words of the text, begins to emerge from obscurity and resume her proper character.

(1.) "Then she arose."—Then, after she had drank the bitter cup, in being stripped of her earthly all: for whilst husband and sons were alive, we hear not so much as of the most distant intention of returning again into the land of Israel. But her God prepared a school of heavenly instructions for her, in the outward corrections, and by the terrible things in righteousness with which he visited her, and thereby taught her that her resting place was not in the country of Moab. Those terrible things which she suffered, made her sit loose from her then present abode, think of the land of Canaan, and long once more to visit Bethlehem the city of her ancestors, and abode of her husband's kindred.

What more than affliction tends to wean the believing soul from the things of earth and sense? What can tend more to make the heart long to be at rest in the peaceful

mansions above, where sinning and suffering are known no more for ever? David was not the only saint who wished for the wings of a dove, that he might fly away and be at rest. In the present case, the rod had a voice, as it always has, whether attended to or not, and the holy woman had an ear to hear, and a heart to understand its language, which was, "Arise, depart, this is not your rest, for it is polluted;" wherefore she arose accordingly to prepare for her departure.

When afflictions, of what kind soever, reduce you to a state of emptiness and nothingness, take off your dependance upon seen objects, and bring you to the necessity of living upon God as revealed in his word, you may say, that in very faithfulness your God hath afflicted you: indeed that he could not have been faithful either to your souls, or to himself, without afflicting you in the very manner he has done. How comely is it for the believer to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

(2.) "She arose with her daughters-in-law."—If it is a beautiful thing, as the Psalmist says, "for brethren to dwell in unity," how lovely must it be to see the mother-in-law, and her daughters-in-law, arising together with an apparent design to forsake the land of Moab, and journey towards Israel, seeing these relative characters are in general no way remarkable for their reciprocal affection.

Now there must have been some remarkable cause for the daughters-in-law venerating, and so far cleaving to their mother in the days of their adversity, which could be nothing besides the following: Naomi was a woman who professed godliness, and acted in character; so that her daughters could not but be struck with conviction of her integrity, and the excellency of her religion. How different is this from the conduct of those professors, which in its own nature tends to give the lie to their profession, to excite prejudice in the carnal mind against the religion professed! thus making poor unconverted sinners tenfold more the children of wrath than they were before. Such professors have not only their own transgressions to answer for, but the blood of poor sinners, by their means hardened, will undoubtedly be required at their hand.

It ought never to be forgotten, that the church of the Lord is as a city set upon a hill, the light of which cannot

be hid; that the daughters of Moab very narrowly mark the tempers, the life and conversation of an Israelite, and consequently that circumspection is indispensably necessary. Solomon says, Prov. xxx. 29, "That there are four things comely in going;" to which a fifth may very safely be added, A Christian walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless. How cautious ought people to be who are in providence called to converse much with the unconverted world; that they may be able to take God to witness that they are clear from the blood of all men. It must be an awful reflection to a saved soul to think that he has, in any wise, contributed to the ruin of any of his fellow-creatures; and must have yielded a comfortable reflection to Naomi, that God had made her the honoured instrument of bringing Ruth into the tents of Israel.

(3.) "She arose that she might return from the country of Moab."—The Moabites themselves may rest at ease in their native land, and worship idols of their own formation. So may worldlings of every rank, and every name, continue satisfied with earthly productions. Not so with chosen Naomi; for to her, God imbitters every Moabitish sweet, dries up every well of consolation, and shuts up every prospect of future happiness in that land of strangers, till her soul became as a child weaned from its mother, and she renounces the name Naomi, laying claim to that of Marah. Nor was she the only person thus taught by terrible things; for we find the Psalmist, Psal. cxxxi. 2, thus confessing; "I have behaved myself as a child weaned of its mother; my soul is even as a weaned child." This also is in some measure the case with every Christian, to whom the Almighty is pleased to imbitter all the enjoyments of the present life, in order to endear unto them the heavenly felicity.

Paul, the holy apostle of the Gentiles, found to his daily and bitter experience, that wherever he went, bonds and persecutions awaited him; and the effect which this experience produced was an earnest desire of dissolution, as expressed, Phil. i. 23; "I desire to be dissolved that I may be with Jesus." Indeed, it is one evidence of the love of God to his people, that when he sees them inclined to wander from his house and ways, to hedge up their way with afflictions, losses, crosses, and disappointments, that

they may say with the church, Hosea, ii. 6, 7; "I will return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now." And chap. xiv. 3. "Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

(4.) Emptiness of all Moabitish comforts was attended with an encouraging, inviting voice from Canaan; "for she had heard in the country of Moab, how the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread." From whence we see that the Lord hath his visiting seasons, as well as times of withdrawment from his people. Sometimes indeed, in holy jealousy, with paternal chastisement, as Psal. lxxxix. 32; "Then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes." And thus he visited Israel with famine, and Naomi with the stripping providences, to which reference has above been made.

He visits his people in manifest mercy in giving them bread after famine, and makes them say with the church, Isa. xii. 1, "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." It soon repents the Lord concerning the evil brought upon his servants, and he says when he sees their distresses, as to the destroying angel, 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, "It is enough; stay now thy hand." It is precisely the same in the case before us; in jealousy for his holy name, he visited his people with a famine; and in tender compassion he also visited them, in giving them bread. This news reached the ear of Naomi, and was good news from a far country, and therefore was to her as cold water to a thirsty soul. O how reviving to the fainting soul is good news from the heavenly country! news of abundant pardon and plenteous redemption to the most abject slaves, the greatest offenders! It is, as it were, the richest wine of the kingdom of heaven, and makes even babes in grace appear as giants, and excites the worm to emulate Jacob, that wrestler with God, and thresher of the mountains of opposition. But this good news did not reach the ear of this venerable matron till she was bereaved of her husband and sons, and left in a state of desolate widowhood; neither does the news from heaven, in common, arrive, till all the springs of creature comfort are dried up; consequently, believers ought

not to think it strange, if they see the Almighty to be stripping them daily of their delights.

(5) "He visited his people in giving them bread."—Notwithstanding it pleased the Lord to visit Israel with a famine on account of their wickedness, his anger was but of short duration; he turned from its fierceness, owns them for his people, and manifests his kindness to them, by visiting them with plenty. We are here taught that the common necessaries and conveniences of life, are as much the gifts of providential bounty, as Christ and salvation are the fruits of everlasting loving kindness. Therefore he is to be sought unto for all things, and to be acknowledged in every enjoyment.

We have likewise a specimen of the divine conduct towards Israel, as different from what it was towards Egypt. The latter had her plenty, and her soil teemed with fruitfulness, before assailed by pinching penury: but although during the seven years of plenty the earth brought forth by handfuls, ghastly famine in its turn stalked through all the land, and soon devoured all that Joseph had carefully laid up in his granaries. Just so it is with the worldling of every character. They have their good things now, and the evil is reserved for an unthought-of hereafter. One possesses his affluence and grandeur, and with contempt treats inferior classes of the people; but the day of downcasting, disgrace, and penury everlasting, is making hasty marches towards his present dwelling; nor shall he be able, in his present circumstances, to evade the just and tremendous judgment. Another sits in a chair of state, and in self-adulation flatters himself that his honour shall be permanent; but death, like a mole, is undermining his station, and preparing him a bed on a perfect equality with the most needy and tattered beggar, where his body shall become a feast to the vilest worms, and, without repentance, his soul the taunt and derision of fiends! Not so with the Lord's people Israel; they are first visited with famine, and afterwards with plenty; the first gives a zest to the last, and the experience of famine makes the plenty more precious and desirable, therefore it is received with the greater thankfulness. The Christian also hath his evil things to bear in his present state of existence, all the best things being reserved till the last. He is now groaning in this

tabernacle, being burdened; the reproaches of the wicked fall upon him daily; temptations assail him every hour; losses, crosses, and disappointments pay him frequent unwelcome visits. To sum up his character in one word, "He is coming up through great tribulation, washing his robes, and making them white in the blood of the Lamb." But all this is leading to the remaining rest; to the mansions of pure and unspotted pleasure; to the sweet delights of the kingdom of Jesus, where the visions of God shall never be beclouded.

(6) Having heard this good news from her own country, this holy woman "went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her."

She was in Moab, a place of vanity, therefore an unsuitable dwelling for a mother in Israel, and especially one who was stripped of her all upon earth. "What fellowship can light have with darkness, or what communion hath Christ with Belial?" This whole world is a place of vanity; and vanity is as much to be deprecated as hell itself, seeing the latter is only the end to which the former naturally and infallibly leads its deluded subjects. To die in a state of sin and vanity, is infinitely worse than to die in a ditch, or on a scaffold; for such a death has no manner of influence upon the concerns of the immortal soul: but vanity stamps everlasting infamy upon its slave, were he even to die upon a bed of state, and under a silver canopy. Surely, my hearer, it must be awful to live in a state or place in which you are afraid to die; and yet this is but too frequently the case, even amongst Gospel hearers. But if you would not wish to die in Moab, or to perish with the world, the word is unto you, "Arise, depart, this is not your rest, for it is polluted."

(7) "She went forth, she, and her two daughters-in-law with her."—It is amiable to see mothers-in-law, and daughters-in-law, so to delight in each others company. And O what a pleasing sight to see relations walking hand in hand, in the fear of the Lord from Moab to Canaan, from this world, doomed to destruction, to the upper regions, the seat of rest and felicity! to see husband and wife, parent and child, coming cheerfully up to the house of the Lord together! But it is sad to behold the one set his face towards the house of vanity, when the other goes to wor-

ship God in his house of prayer. How many hearts this conduct has broken, and what murder of this kind must be answered for in the day of retribution, Infinite Wisdom only knows; but of this we are certain, that it shall all be brought into judgment before an assembled world. How awful the scene, when all the secret ways of mankind, with their causes and effects, shall be publicly investigated by the impartial Judge of heaven and earth! Well may the wicked and impenitent tremble on anticipating their certain doom. And well may the saints of God rejoice on the prospect of their redemption daily drawing nearer and nearer.

(8) "They went on their way to return to the land of Judah."—Orpah had not as yet discovered any inclination to continue in the land of Moab, therefore her mother had no just reason to call her sincerity in question; as man can be approved or censured only by their present works, it being wholly within the divine province to judge of the principles which influence the heart. The practical improvement is couched in this observation: all who set out from Moab to Canaan in earnest, do, like unto them, go on in their way; not indeed in the way of perceived sanctity, but rather under a sense of heart pollution which lays them and keeps them low in the sight and presence of their holy Redeemer; and this growing downwards into nothingness, is one of the evidences of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, whether a man does or does not enjoy the immediate benefit and comfort of it himself.

The righteous hold on their way, because here in this Moabitish world, they can find no continuing city nor place of abode; nothing to satisfy the cravings of an immortal mind: and from the very best authority they have heard, that in their Father's house there is bread enough and to spare; and they justly conclude, that this being the case, it would be madness in the extreme for them to tarry in a strange land, and perish by penury. Indeed, whilst there are many mansions in his house, and yet room for every comer from every quarter of the globe, why should they be discouraged, or by any means deterred from their laudable pursuit of life eternal? Difficulties you may, you must, you shall meet on your way; for it is through much

tribulation that we shall enter the kingdom: but an entrance once administered into the holiest of all, will amply reward your toil and suffering, and cause your present afflictions to appear as waters which have passed away.

To conclude. Remember it is the Spirit of the Lord which discovers the emptiness of Moab, and the insufficiency of all creature enjoyments; which inclineth the heart to forsake father and mother, wife and children, houses and lands, for the sake of Jesus and salvation: it is he who giveth courage and inspireth strength to hold on in the way even to the end, and bring you safe to the heavenly felicity. Let then your eye, and your cry, be ever to Jesus for his Spirit's teaching; for as many as are "led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," Rom. viii. 14.

DISCOURSE III.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband: if I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also to-night and should also bear sons, would ye tarry, &c.—Ruth i. 8—13.

Speaking of the virtuous woman, whose price is above rubies, Solomon says, Prov. xxxi. 26. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness:" truly verified in Naomi, from whom we have not heard a syllable till now, and nothing but wisdom and kindness drop from her lips; all is maternal tenderness and piety, joined with the most becoming gravity. Far from being like the clack of the foolish woman elsewhere described, and known by the multitude of her words; she acts and speaks as if a type of the church, in caring for the welfare of her daughters-in-law. What a rebuke does this venerable character give to tattlers, backbiters, and busy-

bodies? and what a fair example is set before every mother in our modern Israel?

I. "Go, return each to her mother's house."—This breathes the most ardent affection. She loved her daughters, and delighted in their company; but rather than involve them in the difficulties she saw before her, she was ready to deny herself of the only earthly consolation she retained. Much had she lost, her all was at stake, yet her noble, disinterested soul felt more for her daughters-in-law than for herself; notwithstanding she rejected the name of Naomi, and laid claim to that of Marah. "It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me," ver. 13. What an excellent lesson to parents, teaching you to prefer the good of your children, even to your own personal happiness; and indeed what would not a parent sacrifice to the good of his offspring?

Besides parental tenderness, this experienced mother might have a political end in view in giving this advice. By this she brought them to the test, and proved the sincerity of their affection to her, and to that Jehovah whose religion she professed. Till this advice was given, the soundness and sincerity of Ruth's religion did not appear; nor did the rottenness of Orpah's profession discover itself: but this brought them to a final determination, and each clave to the company with which they were formed to associate. This will ultimately be the case with all men, and every one shall have his own proper company; the very company which is their choice in the present state of existence.

Poor Orpah, whose religion was superficial, could now go back with credit, and therefore embraced her mother's advice: but steady, amiable Ruth had her heart effectually touched, and no persuasion could possibly divert her from her purpose to cleave to her mother-in-law, in life, in death, and in the very grave itself. O how steady and immoveable is the attachment of the truly godly! where you see much unsteadiness, you have great reason to fear that the root of the matter is absent, for love is a fixed principle, which cannot be quenched even by many waters.

The believing church being the Redeemer's Naomi, his sweet or pleasant one, in his unsearchable wisdom; it is his pleasure sometimes to bring her into the wilderness of

afflictions and tempestuous trials, on purpose openly to try the love of her professed daughters. In such sifting and winnowing seasons, many Orpahs turn their backs on her assemblies, as if no way interested in her internal concerns; notwithstanding at their first entering into her communion they solemnly professed to cast their lot in with her's for the worse, as well as for the better. But such professors who can walk with the church only in her peace and prosperity, betray their want of affection to the Lord and Master of the church himself; and it is no matter how soon they return back to their own proper company, for they cannot at all profit the Lord's people.

II. "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me."—This holy woman could not part with her daughters-in-law without praying with and for them; thereby setting us an example truly worthy of the closest imitation; and happy would it be if the same conduct were more generally practised in Christian society; of what union of affection might it be productive! she prayed for both with equal earnestness, not knowing which, if either, the Lord had chosen. Hence it appears, that parents ought to pray with and for their children; for how shall they be convinced, that they have at all a share in your prayers, if they are never offered up in their personal presence?

You may do your offspring more good by prayer and supplication for them, than by all your endeavours to render their fortunes affluent. Naomi had neither silver nor gold to confer, but she had, what was more valuable, an heart which could not cease to pray for them.

Indeed one would suppose that every parent who has an heart to love his children, would also have an heart to pray with and for them; but alas! the case happens very often to be quite the contrary, and many children are brought up, who, from the conduct of their parents, are altogether unacquainted that there is either duty, or privilege in that solemnity. But will not the man of grace imitate the high father of the faithful, who, in the fervour of his spirit, prayed earnestly for the son of even the bondwoman, his whole soul going forth in the ardent petition, "O that Ishmael may live before thee!" Where is that parent who will not say, O that my children may live before the Most

High; and with Naomi, "the Lord deal kindly with you, and bless you?" Children, bless God for praying parents; it is possible that they many times pray for you, when they hardly have hearts to pray for themselves. And ye parents, go on to pray for your children, let circumstances be ever so unpromising, for the Lord hath never said to the seed of Jacob, "seek ye my face in vain."

III. "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me." They had shewed conjugal kindness to their husbands whilst alive, buried them honourably when dead, and dutifully continued with their mother-in-law until this time in mourning: in all these things it appears not that Ruth exceeded Orpah. From whence we gather this striking truth, that how excellent soever moral and social virtue may be in itself, it may possess that soul which is altogether uninfluenced by divine religion; and consequently, that this, abstractly considered, is no suitable foundation for the hope of mankind.

"The Lord deal kindly with you, &c."—It may be observed that the Holy Ghost, by whom only prayer is inspired, leads his subjects to pray according to the designs of his grace and providence, so that although all blessings are freely given in Jesus, they shall be obtained by us only in the way of asking; for, "for all these things," saith the Lord, "I will be inquired of by you, O house of Israel." Hence it follows, that when a spirit of prayer for the nation, church, or family, is in exercise, it is an evident sign that suitable blessings are near approaching. On the other hand, when that is absent, as there is just reason to fear it is in this day, there is reason to apprehend that these blessings are at a remote distance, if at all designed. O Britain! my heart bleeds to contemplate thy situation! may God avert the approaching judgments!

"The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me."—The law of retaliation, in both good and evil, is of divine institution, and of very ancient authority, Exod. xxi. 24, 25. "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." This same law is still in force under the Gospel dispensation, with this difference, that under the Mosaic dispensation the execution of it was left with the judges, but now the Lawgiver has resumed

that province himself. But this alters not the tenor of the law, seeing the same God who commands his people to forgive even to seventy times seven injuries, will, upon their forgiveness, himself retaliate upon their enemies; for himself tells us, Mat. vii. 2. "With the same measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Adonibezek, lord of the world, and tyrant of Jerusalem, was fully convinced of the sanction of this law of retaliation, as appears from his own confession, Judges i. 7. "Threescore and ten kings having their thumbs and great toes cut of, gathered their meat under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me." Caleb having defeated his forces, and taken the tyrant himself prisoner, either from his knowledge of his personal history, or by some secret leading from above, ordered his thumbs and great toes to be cut off, which opened his eyes to the villanies he had himself practised on others, and brought him to the above confession, which shews forth the righteousness of the heavenly Governor.

This wretched and unjust tyrant was a lively type of that man of sin described by the apostle Paul, 2 Thess. ii. 4. "As the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.' He also assumes the name Adonibezek, lord or father of the world, the princes of which have kissed his toe, and as it were gathered their meat under his table, holding their crowns and kingdoms by no other tenure than his despotic will. In flat contradiction to holy writ, he has practically declared that it is by him kings reign, and princes decree judgment. "One is your Master, even Christ," says the Scripture; but I am lord of conscience, says the man of sin.

This man of sin is the head of the Roman church, that Antichristian hierarchy, which has ever shut the door of knowledge against the people, and persecuted to death the faithful followers of Jesus; and against which church is already denounced the following awful malediction, Rev. xviii. 6, 7. "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much

sorrow and torment give her." Nor is this to be considered as an empty threatening, for its fulfilment is on its way, and shall be amply accomplished under the third vial, Rev. xvi. 6. where it is represented in point of certainty, as a fact which had already taken place. "They have shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are worthy." Let the man of sin with all his adherents tremble at the dreadful doom; and let the souls under the altar rejoice, seeing that judgment is hastening, and their God will fully execute the law of retaliation.

IV. "The Lord grant that you may find rest each of you in the house of her husband."—Benevolence prompted the pious prayer, and shewed that she preferred the welfare of her living daughters, to the memory of her deceased children. She wisely considered them as loosed from the law of their former husbands, and at full liberty to re-enter the conjugal state with whom, and whensoever they pleased. This shews that a life of celibacy was no more known to ancient custom, than it is any part of Scripture requirement. It is evident that she even considered marriage, yea, a second marriage, as honourable, and a state of rest in comparison of widowhood or virginity. Let experience speak, and it will testify the same truth; therefore those who recommend a sequestered life, ought to be deemed enemies to society.

This good woman looked to God as the giver of this rest, The Lord give each of you rest." Happy, happy it is for that man who can look to the Lord, as the only giver of every good and perfect gift! And assuredly, if men and women were to look to him, instead of fortune, and social connexions, there would be many more happy marriages than in general subsist. Blessed is that man who can upon this, and every other occasion, say with David, Psal. xxv. 15. "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," But, as Mr. Ness observes, with but too much justice, in general on these occasions the great bag, instead of the great God, is most regarded. And this we may conclude, that where the first is the object, true conjugal happiness is not to be expected. Begin with God, and he will continue with you even to your dying moments.

V. Having prayed with and for them, she kissed them,

which shews that a rejection of every form of homage proceeds from superstition, rather than from Scripture usage. Even Abraham, the parent of the chosen race, bowed to the cursed Hittites;* and venerable Boaz, in a pious manner, saluted his harvest people, with "The Lord be with you."

In Scripture we read of a civil kiss of salutation, congratulatory at the meeting of friends, as when Jacob met with his cousin Rachel.† This in the text is valedictory, at an intended parting. Of a flattering, treacherous kiss, designed to cover the malignity of heart intentions: thus Absalom, acting the traitor to his own father, kissed the people on purpose to win their affections. Thus Joab took Amasa by the beard and kissed him, on purpose to conceal the dagger intended to be plunged into his bowels. And thus Judah comes with his, Hail Master! on purpose to betray the Saviour of the world.

We also read of a superstitious and idolatrous kiss, such as the image of Baal received from his worshippers; not unlike to the former practice of princes stooping to kiss the toe of the hoary impostor at Rome. A wanton whorish kiss, Prov. vii. 13. where it is said, "And she caught him, and kissed him." But above all, there is an holy kiss of precious communion between Christ and his church, or the believing soul.

This is twofold.—1st. From Jesus, when he speaks pardon, peace, and loving-kindness to the poor, lost, and self-condemned sinner, mentioned Song i. 1. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips, &c." and who, that feels the bitterness of convicted sin, but will join in the ardent petition?—2d. There is a kiss of homage and submission from the believer unto the Saviour, similar to that which is practised by men in civil society. When any person is by the prince entrusted with office, you hear of him doing homage by kissing the hand of his sovereign and benefactor: how much more reasonably is the pardoned sinner called upon, Psal. ii. 12. "To kiss the Son lest he be angry," and to take upon him the Redeemer's light yoke and easy burden?

This tenderness and piety of the mother produced in her daughters the softest sensations; they were not like many who can hear the most fervent petitions without the least

* Gen. xxiii. 7. † Ib. xxix. 11.

emotion; who, perhaps, while the parent is groaning for their redemption, can snort away the moments of prayer, moments never, ah! never to return! unless it is like the flying Spartans, to lodge an arrow in the heart of the thoughtless. May the thoughtless and prayerless be enabled to keep this in remembrance.

VI. "And they said unto her, surely we will return with thee unto thy people."—So said both, and both meant as they spoke. A few remarks here.

(1.) Promises of speech, and purposes of heart, whether to God, to his church, or to individuals, ought to go hand in hand. Speech is the glory of man, and its intent is to express the meaning of the heart. None ought to promise with their mouths what they do not purpose with their hearts; this is to be fraudulent and deceitful, which is destructive to human society; and such act the part of devils, and prostitute the glory of their nature to the worst of purposes; if a man's word does not express his meaning, and bind him, nothing can: you who have said to the church, "Surely we will go with thee," pray that God would give you grace to keep your word, lest, like Orpah, you turn back again.

(2) Promises and purposes often proceed from passion instead of principle. This we frequently see exemplified in young converts, who have a passionate regard to the person or manner of a preacher; and who for a while are extravagantly fond, and vehemently carried away. Orpah's was evidently from passion. Saul, overcome with David's kindness, promised that he would not seek his hurt. Naomi seemed sensible that this proceeded from passion, therefore prudently distrusts them till she had put them to a farther trial.

A church will, at least ought, to examine into the candidate's principle before admission, and that because,

(3) Purposes and promises proceeding merely from passion soon fall to the ground. A changed heart is necessary to perseverance in following God with Naomi. "I go, sir," and went not, was the language of one whom we read of in the Gospel, Matt. xxi. 30. Some persons' meltings under the ministry of the word, are but as the summer brook which Tema's troops drank of, soon dried up, Job vi. 15. 20. Good thoughts do only make a thoroughfare upon

a wicked heart, they stay not there as those that like not their lodging. Saul may have his religious fits, and Jehu much zeal, but for want of a changed heart both come to nothing.

VII. "And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me?" &c.—Permit me to engage your attention to the following particulars:

(1) "Why will ye go with me?"—She well knew that if their hearts were not formed to it, the customs of Israel would prove irksome. This would have been a stumbling block to the weak; a scorn to the wicked; a heart-breaking to herself. "Why will ye go with me?" says the church. Young candidates should be full of caution, looking well to the grounds of their forsaking their idols: whether a sense of the purity of God and his law; the malignity of sin; Christ's all-sufficiency and fitness be at the bottom. "Why will ye go with the church?" Is it because ye consider it as God's chosen, purchased, and conquered people? Or in Moses' words, "because ye have heard that the Lord is among them?" Numb. xiv. 14. or because the church is Christ's Naomi, his sister, his spouse, his love, his dove, his undefiled? You will enter into a warfare; none have more enemies than the professing Christian: Satan, and all his vassals, his myrmidons, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Now war is to be entered into with caution and consideration, Luke xiv. 31. "What king going to war against another king, sitteth not down and consulteth, whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" You are called to follow the Lamb and his Gospel, in good and evil report; to choose godliness though afflicted, and the Gospel though persecuted.

Naomi's reasoning was full of candour and gentle persuasion. She used not the authority of a mother; but the softness of a friend; for she well knew that candour and kindness, are better than moroseness and rigour.

(2) "Are there yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?" alluding to the Levitical law, Deut. xxv. 5, 6. in which the brother of the deceased husband was bound to take the widow, &c. that the inheritance should not be alienated, nor the husband's name perish. Naboth

lost his life because he would not part with his inheritance, 1 Kings xxi. 3. "And Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." This will apply to the Gospel and its ordinances, descended to us from our ancestors; God forbid that we should alienate or fool it away; should we not transmit it to posterity, children's children might curse us. Slavery follows a departed gospel. God forbid that our land should cast us out, or that our sins should cast out the Gospel, or that Christ's land should be given to Antichrist.

(3) "I am too old to have a husband."—Second marriages are no where in the word of God condemned as unlawful. Had they not been lawful, Abraham had been reproved for marrying Keturah. Naomi gives no intimation of her having relinquished the world to go into a nunnery, &c. The doctrine of a monastic life is contrary to Scripture usage. Enoch walked with God as prince and high priest of the faithful, in a married state, begetting sons and daughters. If Adam and Eve had been separated in a convent or nunnery, how would the world have been peopled? The Pope contradicts God in this as well as in every thing else. "It is not good for man to be alone," says God. "It is best for men in orders to be alone," says the Pope. But whether it be right to hearken unto the Pope more than unto God, judge ye.

(4) "Would ye tarry for them till they be grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands?"—None of them thought of having children without husbands. "Nay, my daughters: for it grieveth me much for your sakes." To a gracious soul, it is very affecting to see others involved in the fruit of its sins. She sinned in leaving Canaan, perhaps she was the principal cause of their removal; but they had not sinned with her, yet they suffer. When the plague went forth upon the people, David spake unto the Lord, and said, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house," 2 Sam. xxiv. 17. O that spendthrift husbands would think of this, how their wives and their children are involved in their punishment!

The words are by some read, "It is more bitter to me

than to you." She was a poor, an old, a childless widow. Such are the objects of Christian charity, and to give to such is to lend to the Lord.

(5) "That the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." —It is well for us if we can see, and are brought to acknowledge the Lord's hand in our afflictions. Divine Providence gives commission to afflictions to seize upon us: Providence orders the measure, the continuance, and the fruit of afflictions. The Stoics ascribed them to inevitable fate; the Epicureans and Atheists to blind fortune; the Philistines to chance. But Christians are of another mind; they hold a different creed, and ascribe the trials and changes of life to a quite different cause. David could see the divine hand through Shimei's wickedness, 2 Sam. xvi. 11. The providence of God regardeth all his works. "The very hairs of your head are numbered."

DISCOURSE IV.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law.—RUTH i. 14, 15.

THE Son of God being ordained the Saviour of all who believe of the Gentiles as well as the Jewish race, it was necessary he should derive his human body of the substance of each; that affinity by blood might between them subsist, and consistently he might become their common Saviour; or, in the language of prophecy, "that he might be a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." In order to this, the seed of the Gentiles must be mingled with the Jews, in that line from which Messiah was to descend. To accomplish which, a long train of providences are introduced as necessary; as, a great famine must take place in the land of Israel, in which even men of property found it difficult to procure the staff of life. Elimelech and Naomi are driven from their possession, to sojourn in the land of Moab; there must their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, marry each a Moabitish woman; die, and be buried in the land of strangers; and old Elimelech himself must pay his debt to nature, and not return

to the land of his God to recultivate his paternal inheritance: by all which, this mother in Israel, this desolate widow, led a life of bitterness, and chose to be called Marah rather than Naomi, because the Lord had dealt very bitterly with her.

We may see from this history, as well as many others, that by the sufferings of his servants, the unerring Majesty of heaven and earth is pleased to bring his purposes to pass, for his own glory, and their ultimate felicity.

What a mixture of sweetness would the waters of bitterness, drank by this good woman, have received, from the knowledge of God's gracious designs; by the emptying of *her* to introduce the fulness of the Gentiles, and make her the honoured nurse of the father of Jesus, the Saviour of sinners.

The leading steps of divine Providence thus briefly hinted at; I shall consider the names, dispositions, and conduct of these daughters of Naomi; and in order to which, I shall,

1. Speak concerning Orpah, who was so loving as to kiss her mother-in-law, and yet had not affection enough to cleave to her like her sister Ruth. There is such a thing as being neither cold nor hot, which seems from the issue to have been Orpah's condition; but it is a dreadful situation, if that threatening denounced against the church of Laodicea is to be regarded.

The name of Orpah is very significant, intending the hinder part of the neck, and seems prophetic of her conduct, in turning back and forsaking her mother-in-law, instead of accompanying her with Ruth into the land of Israel, where the pure worship of the living God was duly maintained. Orpah signifies stiff-necked, which in one sense was applicable, in another inapplicable. In civil life, and as a member of society, her conduct was amiable: in point of relative duty, she was loving and obedient; but as to her religion, she preferred her Pagan connexions to the privileges of the house of Israel. Her country, her kindred, and her gods, were dearer to her than her mother-in-law, and the inheritance of Jehovah. Orpah had been a faithful and kind wife, during the life of her husband, and after his death a loving and dutiful daughter to his mother. But agreeable, natural dispositions, and personal excellen-

cies, being no infallible proof of the love of God, she cannot, with her honoured sister, cast in her lot with her afflicted mother, and renounce her natural connexions, for the sake of her husband's kindred; neither can she finally forsake her, without sorrow and floods of tears.

Orpah went as far with her mother-in-law as consisted with her hope of carnal enjoyment; but when the door of this hope was shut against her, her resolution failed; her love to Naomi could not prevail with her to leave her native country. Like Orpah with Naomi, some sinners we read of, who followed Christ even a great length, but could not forsake all for the sake of his redemption; such was that Scribe, who, when he heard of the uncomfortable lodgings he was to expect, if he followed the Saviour of mankind, laid aside his resolution of following him whithersoever he went. Such also were those who followed Jesus more for the loaves and fishes, than from regard to the doctrine of that immaculate Preacher. Multitudes may be found who can part with much, but cannot part with all for the sake of that endearing name; who will go as far in religion as interferes not with their temporal emolument, but have not heart to take up their cross daily, and follow him through good and evil report. But the being almost a Christian, never conducted any man to heaven. If any man love father or mother more than Christ, he is condemned as unworthy of celestial felicity; unworthy to be the Redeemer's disciple here; unworthy of the enjoyment of him hereafter.

As Orpah seems to have gone a great way with Naomi, and after all went back to her kindred and her gods, so we see some put on a profession of religion, and for a season continue with the church. Like stony-ground hearers, they spring up into seeming Christianity on some ruffling of conscience, or some ferment in the passions: but being, alas! destitute of sufficient root, they cannot bear the scandal and mortifying influence of the cross. For want of love to a crucified Lord, they are not able to endure the pains of crucifixion. Having no proper relish for things unseen, they cannot find in their heart to part with carnal delights. As Orpah loved Naomi, and wept at parting, they may love the people of God upon inferior considerations, and it may grieve them to forsake them; but still their country, and

their gods, have the ascendancy over the promised but unseen pleasures of Israel. Like that young man in the Gospel, they may desire eternal life; but they, with him, would have it in the way of doing, rather than in the way of parting with what they have; and although it may cost them a struggle, when they find that eternal life comes in the way of parting with all, and not as they would have it, for doing some good thing, like him, they will prefer their possessions to the divine inheritance, whatever sorrow may attend their giving up their pretensions to heaven. These go out from among us, because they are not of us. These return "with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Jehu drove furiously in the destruction of Baal, till he obtained a kingdom for his zeal, and then returned to the very same idolatry he had been destroying. But know, my hearers, this great, this capital and important truth, that it is only those "who endure to the end who shall be saved;" only those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb, to whom the Redeemer will grant "to sit down with him on his throne, even as he also overcame, and is set down in the throne of his Father."

The King's daughter is called to incline her ear, and to consider, to forget her own people and her father's house, which call was not obeyed by stiff-necked Orpah. She turned her back upon Naomi and her God, for the sake of her own pagan kindred, and the house of her father. But where Christ, by the displays of his own amiable, personal excellence, is pleased to allure the heart, all other lovers, all other kindred, shall be forgotten; and the enamoured soul shall cry out after her Lord, in such pathetic exclamation as this, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, O Lord! and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee, my God!" All connexions, all enjoyments, all pursuits, must give place to the sweet and endearing influences of drawing grace; and the whole universe will seem a general vacuum, but as God, our chief, our only joy, is pleased to manifest himself therein.

Orpah being gone back to her kindred, we shall,

II. Attend to pious Ruth, whose conduct differed so widely from that of her sister-in-law. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her." I shall here pur-

sue the same method as in the preceding head, and begin with the name Ruth.

Ruth signifies "made drunken," as this young woman had been by affliction, in the death of Elimelech her father-in-law, and of his son, her husband, as well as her brother-in-law, husband to Orpah. And now, put to this trying alternative, either to forsake her beloved, her godly mother-in-law, and all her hopes in the God of Elimelech, or to forsake all that was near and dear to her in the land of Moab.

The heirs of the kingdom seldom escape tribulation in this mortal life. Instructions are dispensed in the school of our heavenly Prophet, by terrible things in righteousness. Very frequently we see the people of God brought to pursue the honours of his sacred name, by the bitter exercise of stripping providences. Divine Providence was as it were big with signal honours, to be conferred in future on this Moabitish damsel; and in the school of affliction the all-wise Governor was pleased to train her up to a capacity for bearing of them gracefully. He empties those whom he intends to fill, and humbles by affliction those whom he intends to honour. For as, on the one hand, "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" so, on the other hand, "before honour is humility," and the way to dignity is through the depth of affliction. Before David is exalted to the throne of Israel, he must not only be banished from the court of Saul, but driven from the house of his father, and hunted in the wilderness as the fowler hunts a partridge upon the mountains. Before the government is established in his hand, he must undergo the fatigues of a civil war; a war with the house of Saul, that turned the land of promise into a horrible Aceldama. Even so, believers, ye must have your bitter, your disagreeable circumstances in the present state, in order to prepare you for the enjoyments of the future world. Ruth, the destined bride of honourable Boaz, must drink deep of the cup of affliction before she is advanced to be named in the annals of Israel.

Ruth also signifies watered, as was her soul with the gracious influences of the sovereign Spirit, in order to her future fruitfulness, recorded in the page of sacred history. The grace and goodness of the God of Israel greatly discovered itself in detaching her from her former connexions

and rivetting Naomi in her steadfast affection, so as to make her willing to part with all, rather than forsake the woman of adversity. She had the same gloomy prospect before her, which had deterred Orpah from any farther pursuit; future consequences were entirely set aside, and whatsoever might befal her, she had fully determined to share in every circumstance in life and in death. Happy Ruth! mistress of such eminent self-denial, to part with all thy Moabitish connexions for the sake of a portion in Israel! Go on, blessed damsel, and thou shalt find, "that whosoever forsaketh houses or lands, wife or children, for the sake of our Jesus, shall receive in this life a hundred fold, and in the end everlasting life." The portion of Israel is not a barren wilderness.

O sinners, ye must be watered in order to become fruitful; born again, that ye may love the Lord with a holy affection; "for if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are done away with him, and behold, all things are become new." Divine charity is not a native of this depraved soil; it is an exotic, and its seed is from heaven. That heart, the imaginations of which are only evil continually, cannot of itself produce love to the Lord our Saviour. "Ye must be born again," says an incomparable Preacher. Lord, I believe, I receive upon undoubted evidence the infallible testimony, and wish no happier lot than to enjoy the precious fruits of regeneration in their most extensive latitude. My God, how happy shall I be to be found the workmanship of thy heavenly Spirit, and an heir of thine eternal kingdom!

Ruth signifies filled, as this holy damsel was with the sacred fruits of the Blessed Spirit; and even with the good things of Canaan, after her God had detached her from her native connexions, and emptied her of her former comforts. For as our God, in his ordinary course of operation, fills none before he has sufficiently emptied them; so he empties none of creature trust and self-dependance but those he intends to fill. If he casts down into the dunghill, it is with a view to exalt unto thrones, and to set you among the princes of his people. How low was Jacob laid under the oppressions of Laban, and fears of his brother Esau, before he exalted him to the dignified name of a prince, who had power to prevail with God; or to be the parent of

the chosen race? How low was David, who knew what it was to lack a morsel of bread before his accession to the throne? Yet they were filled with riches, with honour and with length of days.

Unbelief itself shall never produce an instance of our God having emptied any vessel of its own sufficiency, and then leaving it to be filled with wrath and indignation. It is easily proved, that to empty of self-dependance, by revealing our own insufficiency, is the work of grace; and as easy to shew, that the operations of grace are all perfect and complete; for "we are confident of this very thing, that where God hath begun a good work," such as to empty the soul of all self-dependance, razing every sandy foundation, and beating down every lying refuge, he will perform it even to the day of Christ, when ye shall be filled with all the fulness of God; overwhelmed in the heights and depths, lengths and breadths, of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the unspeakable bliss from thence resulting.

Let us note the difference between these two sisters: Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, as an honoured relation; Ruth clave to her with the attachment of a saint. Orpah came along with Naomi to the borders of Moab, and went back sorrowing for having lost her. Ruth would not be entreated to go back with her sister, but resolved to cleave to her mother to the loss of all; to cleave to her even amidst the bitterness which the Almighty had brought upon her. Orpah is soon persuaded to depart; all persuasions served only to strengthen Ruth's resolution of following her whithersoever she went, and cleaving to her till the latest moments, even in death itself. When that scribe understood that Jesus had not where to lay his head, he soon dropped his purpose of following him as his master; but the blind man who was forbidden to cry after Jesus, because, truly, his crying was troublesome to the disciples, would not be dissuaded from pursuing his suit, and cried out "so much the more" for the opposition he met with. Where the heart is indeed influenced by sovereign grace, and drawn by the eternal Father, opposition will only serve to inflame our love and zeal, as oil cast into the fire serves only to increase its ardour, instead of extinguishing the flame; but if the convictions are merely natural, a small matter of opposition will be sufficient to send as back, that we follow no more

with Jesus. Only those who are cleansed by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, will cleave to Jesus and his believing church, in the dark and clouded day of adversity.

"Entreat me not to leave thee," says amiable Ruth; it was painful to her to hear her mother's entreaties. She knew not how to disobey; yet in the present case, she deemed disobedience even a virtue. Her soul clave to her with a warm, an indissoluble attachment; she could do any thing with greater readiness, than part with her beloved mother-in-law. What a censure in this history upon such persons of that mutual relation, of mothers and daughters-in-law, who are so far from cleaving to one another, that they are scarce able to live in the same town, much less under the same roof with one another. I would recommend this pleasing, sacred history to the attentive regard of all who stand in that endearing relation.

How little of the maxims of the world is here discovered in the conduct of this pious Moabitess! How little of that false, that hollow-hearted friendship so disgracing to mankind! The rich man hath friends enow. But how nobly opposite to the custom of men to cleave to Naomi in her deepest adversity! how like is this to the friendship of the heavenly Friend of Sinners, who loveth at all times, was born for adversity, and sticketh closer than a brother!

Ruth clave to her mother-in-law. To come at the force of the word, used by the divine historian to set forth her warm and close attachment, we may a little note the sense in which it is used in some other places of inspired writ. That great master of sacred diction, the royal prophet, the princely singer in God's Israel, twice useth the same word as here in the text to signify his own affinity with the dust. Psal. cxix. 25. "My soul cleaveth to the dust." Psal. xliv. 25. "For our soul is bowed down to the dust, our belly cleaveth unto the earth." Those who are acquainted with themselves, cannot be at a loss to know how close their connexion is with that dust from whence they were taken, and to which they shall return. In Psal. lxiii. 8. the same word is rendered, "followeth hard." "My soul followeth hard after thee." What he means by following hard, you see in Psal. xiii. 1. "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." This shews the in-

tense longing of the Psalmist's soul for the pleasing enjoyment of his Maker's presence, that he could no more live without it than the hunted hart could comfortably endure without the cooling stream. So pious Ruth "followed hard" to share in her mother's fortunes, whether they should prove favourable or adverse; which naturally supposes that there was a suitableness of temper and interests, and that she had a perfect union with her in hopes and views.

To follow Christ consistently in his ordinances, such an union in heart and affection with his believing church is necessary. They are but unfruitful vines, unprofitable members of Gospel churches, who have interests and views separate from, or opposite unto the common views and interest of Christ in his church; yet we shall find many who most evidently give the concerns of the Redeemer's kingdom, at farthest, but a second place in their care and assiduity. Can it with any propriety be said of such, that they are crucified to the world, and the world to them? that they deny themselves and take up their cross daily? that they love the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart, with all their souls, and with all their minds? Look to it, my brethren, that your first and principal concern be the welfare of the church, the honour of Jesus, and his mediatorial kingdom. If you seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all other things shall be added to you; and you shall never have it to say that you have served God for nothing.

That was a well chosen petition of the royal Hebrew, that he might dwell for ever in the house of the Lord, and inquire in his temple. Psal. xxvii. 4. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. One thing," as if there had been no other thing of worthy of his notice, much less that had the possession of his heart. He had a kingdom to govern, all the tribes of Israel to direct; but one thing, unconnected with kingly rule, lay warmest on his heart. This one thing was, that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, see the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple. He had all the brilliance of a regal court to attract his attention, and allure his desire; but regal magnificence, and courtly parade, were by no means the objects of David's supreme

regard. He had the beauty of kingly majesty every day in his palace to soothe his wishes; but the ultimatum of his desires was, to behold the beauty of the Lord; not barely to have a glimpse of it in a transient manner, but to behold it with steady eye; to behold the beauty of the Lord, so that the eye shall be satisfied with seeing. Might I have this "one thing," I think that heaven and earth might reserve all their other beauties to themselves. This "one thing he desired of the Lord." He well knew it was not in man in general, nor in himself in particular, to command the precious, the much-desired blessing: that it was not to be found in the horrid din of noisy war, nor in the tinselled grandeur of kingly levees, he sought it of the Lord. His heart was resolutely set upon obtaining it, therefore he would seek after it: "and that will I seek after." The near and interesting concerns of my numerous family, the softest endearments, and nearest attachments of consanguinity, shall never divert me from seeking after this, as my chief, my superlative good. Not all the weighty, the important, and arduous concerns of government, nor the deep machinations of war, shall prevent me from seeking thy face, my God and Father, from beholding thy face, O blessed Immanuel. In the church, only in the believing church, are the brightest glories of our gracious God, the pure and illustrious beauties of sovereign grace, conspicuous and manifest. There, O believer, thou mayest inquire, and there shalt thou behold his ineffable beauty beaming forth through the manhood of Jesus.

DISCOURSE V.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her, &c.—Ruth i. 16—22.

See in the person and disposition of Ruth the Moabitess, the believer's firm attachment to the Gospel church. Hear

her endearing and resolved words, "Where thou goest, I go," through smiling fields, or gloomy fens; through verdant meadows, or howling deserts; whether in prosperous or adverse circumstances, I am resolved to cast in my lot with thine. If thy way should lie through the land of Bellah, and the voice of the feathered songsters animate thee for thy journey; if thou mayest happily emerge out of the ocean of afflictions, which long has overwhelmed thee, and the candle of the Lord be rekindled on thy tabernacle; I shall account myself blessed to behold thine enlargement. But although thy way should be more dismal than the shadow of death itself, and the future part of thy life be more afflicting than that part elapsed, I can have no pleasure, no other joy, besides what ariseth from assiduously ministering to thy distress, and sharing in, if I cannot alleviate, thy sorrow.

"Where thou goest, I will go," will be the language of every truly converted soul to the Gospel church. The society of the wicked is held abominable, as the synagogue of Satan, and the maxims of the world as an unclean disease. Even when there is not a full persuasion of interest in Israel's portion, and sharing with the church in her future felicity, you will find a settled, unalterable resolution of seeking her advantage, and sharing in her adversities whilst here, whatever may happen in that world which is to come. This is a noble evidence of Christian affection, and a signal display of the conquest of grace upon the heart; and I may boldly assert, that he who is willing to cast in his lot with the people of God here, shall not be excluded from their enjoyments hereafter.

No man ever did forsake all in this world for the sake of Christ, his Gospel, and church, but he found the Lord to be as good as his word, and received eternal life according to the full tenor of the promise.

"Where thou lodgest, I will lodge."—Here was no proviso made for its safety and delicacy. Ruth might have made this resolution conditionally. "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge," provided thy lodging is safe, easy, and commodious. Like that scribe who, it is probable, would have followed Christ, provided he had been assured of agreeable accommodations in the way; but finding great reason to apprehend a deficiency in this respect, in point of worldly pru-

dence, laid aside his design. It has not in any age been common for the greatest of saints, to have the softest beds, and most comfortable lodgings; and yet, in every age, God has had his followers and witnesses, and the church her unfeigned lovers.

That resplendent cloud of witnesses, of whom the world was not worthy, wandered about in sheep skins, and in goat skins; were destitute of house and home; lodged in dens and caves of the earth, notwithstanding they were the chosen heirs of the kingdom of glory. Nor was the Lord from heaven, the only-begotten of the Father himself, better provided in his sojourning below; for although the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man had not where to lay his head. Notwithstanding which penury, his faithful disciples forsook him not, but were contented with such lodgings as their Lord had for himself, deeming it sufficient that the servants should fare as their Lord and Master.

"Thy people shall be my people."—The forsaking of her own kindred, kingdom, and household gods, is followed by an adherence to the kindred of Mahlon and Elimelech. "Thy people shall be my people." "Hereby," says the inspired divine, "do we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." Without such a love to the brethren, as will cause us to cleave to them in every situation, we give no adequate evidence of our having passed from a state of nature, into the kingdom of the loving Jesus. Wherever this love to the brethren does discover itself, it evidently shews the soul to be born from above. The reason why you love the brethren is, because they love and follow the blessed Jesus; because in their spirit and temper you see the image, or likeness of the amiable spirit by which his whole conduct was influenced. Thus it is, that the love of Christ, and only the love of Christ, constraineth you to pay a distinguished regard to those who worship the immaculate Redeemer. Wherever the heart is right with God, as enlivened by the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit, it will discover itself by this unfeigned love to the brethren. The saints of God will be esteemed the excellent ones upon the earth, in whom is all your delight, the only people with whom you choose to associate.

"Thy God shall be my God."—This is indeed the foun-

dation of Ruth's attachment to Naomi; and from this it appears she had seen that in the spirit and conduct of her mother, which endeared the God of Israel to her affection and supreme regard. That she had seen in her what she had never met with amongst her own kindred and people, therefore this becomes her cool and determinate resolution, "Thy God shall be my God." What a noble and encouraging incentive is this to stimulate us to an observance of the spirit and laws of Christianity, that thereby we may win dark and benighted heathens, our unconverted fellow-sinners, to the love of Jesus, and worship of the Father through him! What an honourable, what an illustrious figure does this mother in Israel make in the annals of heaven; as by her pious and endearing conduct, having allured Ruth the Moabitess to the love of the true and living God!

This exalted instance of genuine piety is inserted in records subject to no future erasement, and to Naomi's honour, shall be made venerable mention of when fleeting time shall have run his destined race, and all shall be immense, unspeakable, inconceivable eternity. O my soul, may this be the highest point of thine ambition in this life, to be enabled by grace to draw the attention of young and thoughtless Moabites to the love and worship of thy holy, thine adorable Redeemer, the perfection of beauty, and centre of heavenly excellency! Mayest thou sojourn here below no longer than this shall be thy ardent wish and daily study!

What shall we think of those called Christians who never visit pagan shores, but with a view to plunder the inhabitants? What must the old Indian inhabitants of Mexico and Peru think of the religion of the Spaniards? What must the inhabitants of Indostan think of the Christianity of the English? Must not the conduct of the Company's servants in the East Indies, fix in the breasts of the unhappy natives an indelible disgust against the name of Christ, as the patron of ruffians? I fear it, and I think upon solid and Scriptural grounds, that the time is coming when a just God will revenge the tyranny of that infamous Company, and plead the cause of the unhappy pagans with the whole British nation: and who shall be able to stand when an avenging God shall stir up himself as a man of war against us?

"Thy God shall be my God," will be the language in

which every true convert shall address the believing church. "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over us, but henceforth we will serve thee, the living and true God. Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the works of our own hands, Ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Because the presence of the incarnate God is in a peculiar manner with the believing church, her assemblies will ever attract the Christian's attention.

"Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried."—In life and in death, she fully cast in her lot with her mother-in-law. She would not so much as have her body carried back to her native country for interment. With thee will I be buried, and repose my dust in thy hallowed tomb. That affinity and union which hold out for the full term of life, must be strong; but stronger still, that which holds good in life and death. Such only is the Christian union. In life, in death, at judgment, and to eternity, it is indissoluble. Those who come to Jesus for life and salvation, consider their bodies as well as their souls as bought with a price, and therefore commit them to him even in death, and in hope lay them down to slumber in the grave, till awakened by that awful voice, compared to which the loudest thunder is but as the softest whisper, and the ruffling hurricane as the breathings of zephyr.

Ruth being inclined and enabled to forsake all, met with a suitable and encouraging reward for her pious attachment to the seed of the promise. She was married to an honourable Israelite, of whom we shall have occasion to take farther notice in some future discourse. "That no man shall serve God for nought," is a good maxim, notwithstanding laid down by the parent of error, and was exactly fulfilled in the case of this illustrious Moabitess. She was honoured with becoming the ancestor of the man after God's own heart, and, through him, the mother of a race of monarchs; not only so, but she became the mother of the glorious Immanuel, that only and blessed Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who is possessed of all power in earth and in heaven. This bounty of divine Providence towards our Moabitish heroine, beautifully confirms the truth of our Lord's words, where he says, "Whosoever shall forsake father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands for his sake,

shall in this life receive a hundred fold, as well as life eternal in the world to come."

You, therefore, to whom the world is crucified by the cross of Christ, and who resolve to follow your Redeemer conscientiously, even if it should cost you your earthly *all*, you see the good set before you in the promise—"Even in this life ye shall have a hundred fold;" not always in kind indeed, but you shall be sure of it in value. Riches, honour, ease, and pleasure, such as this world boasteth the power to give, are no parts of the good included in the promise. But you shall receive righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and thus have the kingdom of God set up within you. Such a righteousness as shall render you all holy and complete, lovely, and beautiful even in the eye of infinite Holiness; righteousness, that for its splendour, shall be as a mirror, to reflect the illustrious excellence of every divine perfection: peace, which only God can bestow, which can be obtained only in Christ; peace, which none but the children of sorrow, and sons of warfare are capable of receiving. This is the "peace of God which passeth all understanding," bequeathed to thee by thy departing Redeemer, and such as an unregenerated heart never experienced. This is the portion of your souls, O ye who fly for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel, "joy in the Holy Ghost!" Little of heavenly joy is experienced before you are brought down to the very margin of destruction. It is impossible to know the joys of pardoned sin, before the sentence of the law has been denounced in the conscience, and we are brought as guilty criminals to Jesus for a free pardon; none besides the condemned being capable of receiving pardon. But when sin is set before you in all its aggravations, and threatens your ruin by its formidable terrors; when the law has denounced the condemnation due to it, and instead of the execution of the sentence, you receive redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins; how sweet is the joy! how transporting the pleasure from thence resulting! such righteousness, peace, and holy joy, are connected with a forsaking of all for the sake of Christ, and his great salvation.

Is it then your holy resolution to part with all, to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness? May grace strengthen your resolution! You will find your ac-

count in the wisdom of your choice, and have cause to bless God for the gift of this wisdom. You renounce your unlawful gains, and ungodly pleasures, and lo, there is before you an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; a kingdom that shall never have an end, and a crown that is not liable to be tarnished. Dost thou forsake thy carnal companions, in whose society thy heart can no longer take delight? Behold the saints of the Lord, the excellent ones of the earth, are appointed the companions of thy warfare, whilst here, under the guardianship and protection of holy angels in the days of thy pilgrimage, and the sharers of thy joy when thy warfare is accomplished. Hast thou lost the good will of thy relatives? has father and mother forsaken thee, because thou wilt worship the Lord God of thy fathers after the manner which the world account heresy? Be not concerned at it; for when father and mother forsake thee, the "Lord will take thee up." Thou hast made a goodly exchange. Thou losest indeed thy natural parents, but the everlasting Father himself becomes thy *all.* The Father of Jesus, and thy Father, are now identically the same. Blessed, O Lord! are the people whose God thou art, and whom thou hast chosen for thine own inheritance! I cannot set before my hearers the extent and glory of the privileges provided for those, who by grace forsake their native *all*, for the sake of Jesus, and his great salvation; but the reapers are commanded to drop handfuls on purpose for them, and bring forth all the treasures of the Gospel for their relief. How happy! how truly blessed is your lot, if ye be indeed the followers of Jesus!

Would you follow the Lord Jesus whithersoever he goeth, but for that unworthiness and sin that cleaveth to you? learn then a profitable lesson from amiable Ruth. You have many objections against yourself, and so might she have had, if grace had not prevented; objections in all trepects equal to your own. She was a descendant of Moab, he son of incest, and therefore, instead of blessing, might have expected cursing for her father's sake. She had been brought up an idolatress, and an enemy to the Lord God of Israel; had always been a follower of the customs disapproved by the law of the Hebrews, and a stranger to the constitution of the kingdom of Messiah; but notwithstanding all her objections, she was determined to worship

the God of heaven, and trust in the portion of Israel: therefore she expresseth her resolution, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried."

It is a happy thing to be brought to resolve to cleave to the people of God in this life, whatever become of you in the future world; to resolve to die, and be buried with the people of God, whether you have the assurance of rising with them on the morning of the great day or not: to walk in the ways of Immanuel now, if you should even be spurned from his presence hereafter. Never were there any brought to this resolution, but who found it to terminate according to their highest wishes, and who were admitted into that felicity for which they dared not to encourage even the faintest hope, in the drooping days of their gloomy despondency.

Are you convinced that Jesus, our Redeemer, is the true God and eternal life? Are you satisfied in your own mind that his ways are the right ways of life and salvation? Would you desire to be worshippers of him; to worship him in his own appointed way?—Worship him then in his own way, and leave the issue entirely to him; he will certainly deal as favourably with you as he did with Ruth the Moabitess, for he is no respecter of persons. We may very safely challenge Satan and *unbelief*, with their united counsel, to produce a single instance of any poor penitent, humbled, desirous soul, following Jesus, cleaving at all events to his people, and at last becoming a cast-away. An instance cannot be produced; no! perish who may at the libertine's gate, intreating for the crumbs which drop from the voluptuous table, none ever perished at the gates of Immanuel; for he, only he, is the friend of sinners; and of none among the human race besides sinners.

"So they two went on till they came to Bethlehem."

Here is an instance of God's faithfulness in restoring comfort to his mourners.—Elimelech and his sons were taken away, Ruth is given as a fast friend.—When Abraham lost Sarah, Rebekah is brought into her tent. Types of the Jewish and Gentile church.—When all men forsook Paul, the Lord stood by him, 2 Tim. iv. 16.—When the people spake of stoning David, he encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

It is the Lord's time to bring new comforts when there is a death upon our helps, and damp upon our hopes.

"So they two went on."

Their principles were one, the life and love of God in the soul.—Their object was one, to come and trust in the shadow of divine wings.—Their interest was common, the salvation of their souls, and communion by the way.—These made their friendship invariable; heartened them to hold on their way.

"Until they came to Bethlehem, the house of bread."

How many accompany each other to Bethaven.—But this is betraying instead of befriending one another.—Had Jonadab curbed Ammon's passion, instead of devising means to gratify it, he had done like a friend.—Many Jonadabs infest kings' courts, but the curse of God will follow them.

Our travellers are an emblem of the righteous, who hold on in their way, &c.

"And all the city was moved about them."

Seeing the great change in Naomi's circumstances.—God worketh great changes in persons, families, cities, and countries.—What a change on the proud Assyrian monarch.—He looketh upon every one that is proud, and bringeth him low, Job xi. 12.—On families, as Job's and Saul's.—On cities, as Jerusalem, Lam. ii. 15. "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"—On countries, as the Assyrian, the Grecian, the Roman empire.—Such changes will affect beholders: Is this Babylon, Athens, Rome, or London?

"And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, but call me Marah."

The condition of creatures is soon changed.—Those who look on themselves to be delightful ones, he maketh Marahs; both pharisees and his own foolish children.—Those who look upon themselves as Marahs in God's sight, he constitutes Naomis. He calls no man Benjamin, son of the right hand, who has not first been Benoni in heart.—Before honour is humility.

"I went out full, but the Lord hath brought me home again empty."

Her going out was of herself, but her coming home was of God.—People usually get full before they go out from

God's way and habitation.—How full soever when they go out, God brings them home empty. See the prodigal.

Note. To seek for gain or pleasure out of God's way, is the ready way of coming to loss.—To go out of God's way, is to go out of his protection.

To go from the land of promise to the land of curse, is the way of certain danger. Let those who slight church-fellowship think of this.—Many are tempted to go out of God's way for gain, but they meet with gall and wormwood, instead of honey.—Jehoshaphat had like to have lost his life for going with Ahab, 2 Chron. xviii. 31.—He quite lost his ships, 2 Chron. xviii. 37.—Good Josiah lost his life by going rashly out of God's way, 2 Chron. xxxv.

"The Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me."

It is a great alleviation of pain to eye God in our affliction, though even brought by ourselves.—God has come in as a witness against me for choosing Moab rather than Canaan. Thus she kissed the rod.—We may see how the believer differs from himself at different seasons.—In an humble frame, David could see God had bid Shimei curse him.—In another, he could not see how God had bid Nabal be churlish.—Eyeing of God in our troubles, is a sovereign help to true patience.

Remark. Their arrival was in the beginning of barley harvest:

David's extremity was God's opportunity, 1 Sam. xxiii. 20.—There is a fulness and fitness of time for every event.—The redemption of Israel from Egypt.—The coming of Shiloh, when the sceptre was departing from Judah.—Old Testament vision sealed.—The converting of the soul by grace.—Deliverance from affliction—finishing our appointed period and work.—You will all get to the house of bread in the beginning of harvest—a full and plentiful harvest eternally before you.

DISCOURSE VI.

Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, &c.
Ruth ii. 1—14.

THIS widow was not forsaken of her husband's rich kindred, as is usual in such cases.—When otherwise, it is of the Lord. God never wants instruments to succour and comfort those who trust in the shadow of his wings.—If Elimelech dies, Boaz is raised up.—David says, Psalm xxxvii. 25, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken," &c.—There was a time when no Jew durst assist Jeremiah, chap. xxxviii. and the princes were his mortal enemies.—God had then an Ethiopian Ebed-melech, *the king's servant*, to serve him in his prophet.—An Ethiopian outwardly, but Jew inwardly.—His kindness was well rewarded, xxxix. 16, 17. "I will deliver thee, saith the Lord, and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. Because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord."—Whoever does so shall receive a prophet's reward.

"A mighty man of wealth." It is rare that religion and riches meet. "Not many rich men," &c.—Yet there are some. Abraham was very rich, yet he was the righteous man of the East, Isa. xli. 2. David and Solomon.—Riches neither further or hinder salvation but as loved and trusted in.—Boaz was both rich and religious.—He was a type of Christ, who is also a mighty man of wealth in a twofold sense.—In a natural way, "The earth is the Lord's, with the fulness thereof." In a spiritual way, "It hath pleased the Father," &c. Col. i. 19.—"In him are hid are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," Col. ii. 3.—Durable riches and righteousness are his.—The riches of grace, of love, of mercy, and glory.

It is the whole work of Gospel ministers to publish his unsearchable riches.—Eternity itself will never count them.

"He was a kinsman of her husband's, of the family of Elimelech," therefore the Goel.—Jesus is our nearest kinsman and Goel. Nearest and dearest—Elimelech—my God the King—Jesus is of the family of our God the King. Only-begotten, &c.—Elimelech—the counsel of God.—

Our kinsman who sits in the divine council—the wonderful Counsellor.

"And his name was Boaz." In strength; or strength and fortitude.

Boaz was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.—He made the joy of the Lord his strength.—Applicable to Jesus—the strength, arm, and power of Jehovah. —His strength is shewn by his works.—He exhausted divine wrath—spoiled principalities and powers—redeemed his people with a strong hand and stretched-out arm—protects his servants, reapers, and gleaners, and gives them all till they are sufficed and leave.

"And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi," &c.

This is the first movement of the grand machine which brought such grand things about.—From gleaning she arose to be the ancestress to Jesus.—Great things often arise from very small beginnings.—A restless night by Ahasuerus, produced that great revolution in favour of the Jews, Esther vi.—So of our Henry VIII.—What a small beginning had the American empire?—What dreadful work is likely to arise from the destruction of a little tea?

High buildings are raised upon the lowest foundations.

"Let me go now into the field to glean."

She was for improving the present moment.—She would do nothing without her mother's consent and approbation. —Some think they may dwell under Naomi's roof, yet act as they please.—"A church is no prison;" the words of a mother ought to be as law to children. Prov. i. 8. "Forsake not the law of thy mother." Lev. xix. 3, puts the mother before the father, "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father."—Because wicked children despise her authority. Yet every child is a Jabez, a child of his mother's sorrow—in conception and travail.—Female feelings are keener than those of men.—Ruth murmured not, but submitted to her circumstances.—Though a young convert, she had learned to be in want.—What a lesson Paul learned, Phil. iv. 11, 12. "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound; every where and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

It is heaven upon earth to see better things in the will

of God than in our own will.—To be willing to be without what God sees not meet to bestow.

"Into the field to glean."

Some cannot dig, being accustomed to idle habits, are too proud to glean, are ashamed to beg.—Therefore they cheat, defraud, and steal; the extortioner is as bad as the thief.—Ruth was not above using every honest endeavour to maintain herself, and assist her mother.—An excellent pattern for church members.—Strongly reproves the idle, the dishonest.—An honest heart will rather starve than steal; die, than do wickedly.

"After him in whose sight I shall find grace."

She would not glean, though lawful, Lev. xix. 9. without the owner's consent.—A heart influenced by grace, will ask—Is it lawful? Is it decent and lovely? Is it expedient?

Those who having found favour with God, look to him for supplies; shall find favour with man also in the time of necessity. Jer. xv. 11. "Verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction."—"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Prov. xvi. 7.

"And she said unto her, Go, my daughter."

It is difficult which to admire most, Ruth's submission, or Naomi's meekness and endearing language.—"She had a meek and quiet spirit," 1 Pet. iii. 3.—God hath promised the earth to the meek, who are the least fit to take care of it, because most likely to be sworn out of it, as Naboth was.—To what end then is the promise made? God will take care of the meek. The less that Moses was moved at Miriam's murmuring, the more doth God plead his cause. Numb. xii. 1, to the close.—Let this encourage you to bring all your difficulties to the Lord, saying with Micah, vii. 9. "I will bear," &c.

"And her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech."

With regard to Ruth this was hap, or chance; she knew not his field from another.—With God it was providence.—Those things which with us are accidental, are all the determinations of holy providence.—Hers was to go out to glean; but God directed her to this field.—"It was in the

eye of man mere chance that brought Jacob and Rachel together," Gen. xxix. 9.—Likewise Pharoah's daughter going to bathe, both as to time and place.—"Moses meeting with Zipporah," Exod. ii. 17.—The Syrian shot at a venture, but God directed the arrow.—The various incidents by which our present connexions were formed, religious and civil.—Sometimes crossing our inclinations to bring about his own purposes. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," Jer. x. 23.

"And she came and gleaned:"—a mean, but honest employment.—Mean, not suited to her former circumstances.—Honest, answerable to the integrity of her heart. —Mean employments honestly stooped to in the time of need, are frequently preludes to preferment. "God resisteth the proud," &c. Jam. iv. 6.

To have the mind brought down to our circumstances, is the foreruuner of exaltation, 1 Pet. v. 6. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."—The lowly are like Jesus,—the proud like Satan.—The one honoureth God, the other invades his prerogative.—God dealeth differently with them. The Lord looketh upon the contrite;—He beholdeth the proud afar off. Psal. cxxxviii. 6. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly, but the proud he knoweth afar off."—In Ruth we have diligence and its reward; diligence naturally tends to advancement, Prov. xxii. 29.

"And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem."—A note of attention to this special providence.—Ruth is led to the field,—Boaz is sent to meet her, to bring about the great design of providence.—The footsteps of providence contemplated drop much fatness. Psal. lxv. 11, 12. "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side."—Providence is the execution of the divine decree, like it, always infallible and well timed.—Esau could not come in with his venison, till Jacob went out with the blessing.—How opportunely it brought Pharoah's daughter to infant Moses!—Pharoah's dream was Joseph's deliverance.

Boaz came to look after his country affairs; though a mighty man of wealth, he looked after his country affairs—

his eyes were every way;—on the servants, reapers and gleaners, yea, eating with and lodging among his labourers, chap. iii. 2. 4.

"He said, The Lord be with you."—Of all salutations this is the best.—It was the practice of the church of old. Psal. cxxix. 9. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord."—Holy religion rather requires than prohibits civil salutation, Matt. x. 12. "When ye come into a house, salute it."—How grace humbles the heart! makes mighty men of wealth not above their fellows.—How beautiful the pious strain!

Boaz. "The Lord be with you."

Servants. "The Lord bless thee."

"Then Boaz said unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?"

This servant Josephus calls his bailiff, or steward.—"Whose damsel is this?" Her dress, or complexion, but especially her diligence, caused her to be noticed.—"A man diligent in his business," &c.—Strict inquiry should be made respecting those damsels suffered to glean in the field of Gospel ordinances—Whose are they, God's or Satan's?—It is when men sleep respecting this, the enemy sows tares, more especially should inquiry be made after those designed to be made reapers.—The ruin of religion arises from a depending more on human learning than the Spirit's teaching.

"And the servant said," &c.—Without hesitation, being faithful, he could give a good account of those whom he suffered to glean in his master's field.—Those who are the church's stewards ought to be capable of giving a good account of those they suffer to partake of her bounty.

Three things are requisite to be found in them.

1. That they have indeed cast in their lot with Naomi.

2. That they have laboured from the morning until now; not idle in either sense.

3. That they have been meek and modest, "I pray you let me glean," ver. 7.

"This is the Moabitish damsel, that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab."

Little did he think this damsel was his intended mistress, any more than Boaz did.—Her cleaving to Naomi made her name known, and procured her favour in Israel, and

with the master of the field.—So with church members.—All are Moabites by birth who glean in the Gospel field.

"And she said, I pray you let me glean after the reapers amongst the sheaves."

Advancement of a lasting nature usually begins in humility. It was so with Joseph, with David, and with their antitype Christ. She little thought that this rich field was to become her own.—What mean thoughts have young converts of themselves, when they come first to glean in the Gospel field! They cannot think they have a right to the handfuls, much less to the sheaves, less still that the field is their own; and least of all, that the unsearchable riches of the owner are theirs.

"She hath continued from the morning till now."

This diligence recommended her to Boaz's attention—"Seest thou a man," &c. Prov. xxii. 29.—"The hand of the diligent maketh rich."—What the Lord gives we gather.—It is not a beginning well, but continuing in diligent application to the use of means, that is crowned with success.

"Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not my daughter?" &c.

"Hearest thou not, my daughter?"—How grace humbles even mighty men of wealth, to utter the law of kindness even to the poor and needy.—"My daughter?"—a kind interrogation to rouse her to what he was going to say.—We have need to be roused when Jesus speaks, our ears being heavy, and our hearts inattentive.—Hearing is often without taking heed, goes in at one ear and out at the other.—To take heed how, what, and who you hear, is good advice.—Ye young are particularly called to attend to the grave advice of age and experience.

His directions begin.—"Go not into another field to glean."

Here was good will shewn to a necessitous person, not in word only, but in deed and in truth.—There is nothing meaner than lip charity, yet some go not even so far.—It is not easy to make a fire or a garment with mere words.—Boaz acted godlike.—God is more kind to his gleaners than Boaz to Ruth.—He turns all his promises into performances.—There are who rob God in his cause and ministers; but they are cursed with a curse. Mal. iii.

8, 9. "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me; but ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.—Ye are cursed with a curse."

"Go not to glean in any other field."

God's gleaners have or should have their peculiar Gospel fields in which constantly to glean. John. x. 5, 8. "Christ's sheep hear not the voice of strangers."—"They have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," Heb. v. 14. —They have a spirit of discerning, by which they distinguish between the voice of Christ and of antichrist.—Hence they hate every false way of either doctrine or discipline, Psal. cxix. 104. "Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."—They ought not to glean in another field that is even orthodox, to the neglect of gleaning in their own proper field.—Duties are reciprocal; where the pastor is obliged to preach, the people are obliged to hear, where circumstances of time and place will admit.—There will God come and bless you, Exod. xx. 24.—In wandering, a snare is more likely to be met with than a blessing, Prov. xxvii. 8. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."

Only three things can dispense with our duty here, except in the case of servants—old age, illness, and distance of place.

Some reasons to enforce this duty.

1. In her assemblies is a body politic. One foot cannot be in London, and the other in Westminster. Separation of members naturally tends to dissolution.—2. A faithful attendance was promised at admission, when members gave up themselves to the church.—3. The example of primitive Christians calls for it. "They met with one accord in one place," Acts ii. 1.—4. Officers cannot watch over those who are given to wander, yet to their watchings all are called to submit, 1 Thess. v. 12. Heb. xiii. 17.—5. Forsaking the assembling of ourselves together is the forerunner of wilful sinning, Heb. x. 25, 26.—6. If one member has a right to wander from his place, all have; if all have, the pastor must have, being a member; then there is an end to all communion.

"But abide fast by my maidens;" for society and for safety.—For society; of them she would learn the lan-

guage of Israel, and the worship of the God of the Hebrews.—With them she would be safe—for the presence of this mighty man of wealth is particularly promised to his assembled people.—God will be kind to those gleaners who industriously keep to their own company, like Peter and John, Acts iv. 23.

Hence members see their duty and privilege joined.—And officers should be stirred up to watchfulness.

"Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap."

Let thine eyes be on the Gospel field, it is long, wide, and rich.—Here reapers do reap, gleaners do glean, and Bartholomews do draw water.

"Go thou after them,"—So long as they reap in the field of Boaz, for the sustenance of his household.—But should they go into another field, go not after them.—Even Paul wished not to be followed farther than he followed Christ, 1 Cor. iv. 16. "Wherefore I beseech you be ye followers of me."—How far? "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," 1 Cor. xi. 1.

"Have I not charged the young men that they should not touch thee."—Either wantonly to defile her, or cruelly to rob her of the fruits of her gleaning.—Some will, at the close of a day, rob a poor gleaner of all she had picked up through the whole, wantonly ruining her comforts.—But God thus chargeth, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," Psal. cv. 15.—On the contrary, God chargeth to comfort his people, Isa. xl. 1, 2. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."

"Have I not charged the young men?" &c,—An excellent example for masters of families, to charge their household, that no wickedness should dwell with them, Psal. ci. throughout.—Nebuchadnezzar's law, Dan. iii. 29, was good.

"When thou art athirst, go unto the vessels and drink of that which the young men have drawn."—With hard labour in that hot country. But mercy is never stingy, nor churlishness to be found with charity.—Faint type of the liberality of our Jesus, who gives the water of life to his people, John iv. 10. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou

wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."—This revives the drooping soul, as a well of living water springing up unto eternal life. "He gives it freely," Rev. xxii. 17.—"To every one that thirsts," Isa. lv. 1.—"To every comer, even the unworthy," Ezek. xvi. 6.—"The water which Christ gives quencheth our thirst for worldly vanities," John iv. 14. Such as thirst for these never drank heartily of that.—"Not water only, but blood, the blood of God," Acts xx.—"This blood is drink indeed," John vi. 55.

God hath his Beer-Elims or wells of the mighty ones. Prophecies, declarations, promises. All wells of salvation. He hath his Bartholomews, or water-drawers, who draw forth the words of eternal life. These young men draw for the gleaners, those thirsty souls who bear the heat of the day. It costs them much sweat of both brow and brain. Yet they do it with singing, because the work is pleasant. Numb. xxi. 17. "Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it."—"They draw it with joy, because they drink of the water themselves," Isa. xii. 3.

A Puritan observes, that the day consecrated to Bartholomew, was the very day on which the Bartholomews, were bound by an act of uniformity;—and black day of the Parisian massacre.

"Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground."—Overcome with his condescension and benevolence. O how low bows the soul when God speaks words of peace! The lowly shall be exalted, 1 Pet. v. 6.—Humble Lazarus to Abraham's bosom.—When Job abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes, God turned again his captivity, Job. xlii. 6. 10. David was little in his own eyes when made king over Judah.

"Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"

Nothing but necessity on her part.—He could not profit by her gleaning. This was all her own.—Our goodness extendeth not to God, Psal. xvi. 2. "My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight."—What saith the sinner when divine love is manifested? Why have I found grace in thine eyes? Lord, what is man? What am I or my father's house?—I am but a stranger—to God, to god-

liness—to thy ways and people—possessed of an estranged and a straying heart.

"And Boaz said to her, It hath been fully shewed me all that thou hast done to thy other-in-law," &c.

Her faith in God, and love to Naomi, were noted by all; as when a poor sinner sets his face Zion-ward, how the godly take notice of him. Her obedience to her mother-in-law, parting with all, joining herself to a strange people, could not be hid.—True religion cannot be concealed, hence the church is a city set upon a hill, Matt. v. 14.—True religion is connected with due praise which follows it, even, as the shadow the body, Heb. xi. 2. "By faith the elders obtained a good report."—The religion of the Thessalonians sounded through the world, 1 Thess. i. 7, 8. "Ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad."—It is an evidence of grace to prize its work upon others. "Hereby we know that we are passed," &c. 1 John iii. 14.—Ruth valued that she saw in Naomi—Boaz that he saw in Ruth.

"The Lord recompense thy work," &c.

He could not recompense her pious work of faith and love himself, therefore appeals to God in her behalf. Every work of love is sure to meet with its proper reward; a disciple's reward, a prophet's reward, Matt. x. 41—43.

Such as shew the kindness of God to distressed saints particularly, shall receive the same kindness in their own distress, Matt. vii. 2. "With what measure," &c.—David was greatly distressed, and Jonathan shewed him kindness, 1 Sam. xix. xx. chap.—David shewed the kindness of God to his seed, 2 Sam. ix. 3.—So Ruth to Naomi, Boaz to Ruth.

"Under whose wings thou art come to trust."

A metaphor taken from the hen and chickens.—Or the ark, which covered a cursing law.—The mercy-seat covered the ark.—The cherubim covered the mercy-seat.—This typified Christ, in whom the law has its end.

"Ruth left all to come and trust," &c.

Certain refuge here, every perfection, purpose, &c. being a safeguard. "Ye are dead," &c.

DISCOURSE VII.

And Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.—Ruth. ii. 14.

In some preceding discourses we have followed Naomi and Ruth in their journey towards the land of Canaan. In this we find them amongst the Lord's inheritance, seeking for rest after the long series of affliction which had passed over them. When they came to Bethlehem, the native city of Elimelech, from whence they departed in the beginning of the famine, the whole city was moved with tender affection to this venerable matron and her pious daughter, and to welcome her return to the land of her fathers. Their kind congratulations, far from yielding her the intended consolation, only served to rip open her wounds, and make her sorrows to bleed afresh, by bringing past endearments to her remembrance, and presenting the images of her lost husband and sons to her disturbed imagination. Wherefore she thus answers their welcome with apparent anguish; "Call me not Naomi; call me Marah; for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me again home empty: why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" From which pathetic exclamation we may note,

Those whom the Most High intends in a peculiar manner to honour amongst his people, frequently have the bitterest cup of afflictions put into their hands prior to their exaltation. So it was with Abraham, as well as with his daughter Naomi. First he is called upon to cast out Ishmael his son, for whose life he had so earnestly entreated the Almighty in this ardent petition, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" Even the father of the faithful entreated in vain, when his desires corresponded not with the will of his God, whose pleasure it was "that in Isaac should Abraham's seed be called." Ishmael cast out and rejected, a cup more bitter still is prepared for him. His Isaac, upon whom the hopes

of his family depended; his Isaac, with whom was the promise of life, and from whose loins the seed of the woman, the Saviour of mankind was to descend; even Isaac, who was by a miracle brought into the world, was demanded; demanded a burnt offering; and, strange to speak it! demanded by that God who says, "Thou shalt not kill;" that God who had promised, "That in Isaac should all the families of the earth be blessed:" yea, demanded to fall by the hands of his own father, at his command whose characteristic is MERCIFUL. Thus was his holy soul tried to the uttermost. But had he not been thus tried as by fire, he had never borne the honourable name of *Father of the Faithful*, by which he is known in the church through all generations. In like mannner, if this mother in Israel had not drank so deep of the cup of sorrow, she had not been so honourably mentioned as she is, in every nation blessed with the light of revealed truth.

She is now emerging out of her former distress, and the day of consolation begins to arise upon her, and continues to advance, though indeed by slow degrees, till it arrives at its meridian splendour. To the tracing of which advances, I hope a discussion of our text may in some degree contribute. In attempting of this, I shall not at all enter into the controversy, whether this book is to be considered as typical and mysterious, or merely historical. My hearers are at liberty to judge for themselves. It is sufficient for me to know assuredly, that whatever was written aforetime was written for our instruction, that we through comfort of the Scriptures might have hope; and to find the history of Ruth capable of being accommodated to Gospel purposes. Apprehending therefore from these premises that we have a right to improve all, or any part of the Old Testament history to the illustration of the blessed Gospel, without exposing ourselves to the charge of enthusiasm, I shall proceed to prosecute the subject in the following manner:

I. Speak concerning Boaz the husbandman and master of the field, who invites to come hither at meal-time.

II. Of the damsel invited to come hither, &c. "Ruth the Moabitess."

III. Consider the invitation itself, "Come thou hither at meal-time, eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar."

IV. Enlarge upon the conduct of Ruth on this occasion, "She sat beside the reapers, she did eat, and was sufficed, and left."

In which conduct she is an eminent example of holy industry, an example worthy of the imitation of every professor of Christianity.

According to this plan, I am

I. To speak of Boaz the husbandman and master of the field, who invites to come hither at meal-time; concerning whom we may note,

1. His name, Boaz. 2. His profession, a husbandman. 3. His circumstances, a mighty man of wealth. 4. His disposition, generous, hospitable, and benevolent. 5. His pedigree, a kinsman of the family of Elimelech. On each of these I would offer a few remarks.

1. His name, Boaz. The father of Obed, and David's great grandfather, Boaz, who makes a principal figure in this history, and whose name signifies, "In strength," which is more applicable to Jesus the Husband of the church. Jesus is the arm and power of the Lord, who is revealed in the heart of every believer as the sole ground of his hope, and spring of true enjoyment He is strength to the weak, and power to those who are ready to faint. He only is the dwelling-place and fortress of his people, where the fearful hide themselves in the day of indignation; where they are everlastingly secure from every future evil. He only is that munition of rocks, and rock of defence, in which the righteous dwell on high, eat their promised bread, and drink the vital streams.

His works sufficiently evince the greatness of his power, and prove him to be the mighty God as well as the loving, the compassionate friend of sinners. He left no work unperformed which was requisite to fulfil the purposes of infinite love, and illustrate the transcendent excellence of the divine perfections. Did the Eternal Father before all worlds choose a people for himself; a people appointed to salvation for the praise and glory of his grace? and did this people, this elect church, fall in the common ruin of the lapsed race? had guilt, interposing between God and them, made their access to his presence impracticable? Behold Jesus appears as the sealed and sent of God; appears as the sinner's friend, and legal substitute. The

mighty God appears a son in our nature; the Everlasting Father is born into our world; the Prince of peace makes war upon the powers of darkness, and the holy child Jesus sustains the wrath of avenging Omnipotence.

Great is this mystery of godliness! God manifested in the flesh to take away the sins of his offending creatures. O believer, thy strong, thy loving Redeemer stood in the breach between thy God and thee, to reconcile thee to him; to bring thee to the divine embrace, willingly yielded up himself as thy propitiatory sacrifice. O my soul, mayest thou never forget the wormwood and gall which thy Redeemer drank as thy representative! Infinite wrath was thy due desert; infinite holiness was by thee affronted. The curse, by thee procured, fell all upon him that loved thee unto death. Thou escapest indeed from the dire arrest of incensed justice; but not one of thine innumerable sins, no part of thine aggravated guilt, has been overlooked and passed by with impunity; in Jesus, thy common person, thine iniquity was punished to its utmost demerit. Ask thine own heart, O believer, what wrath thy sinfulness has deserved? see if any thing short of the deepest hell, and the most extreme torture of the dreadful pit be adequate to thy rebellions? yet see innumerable myriads, whose sin was as atrocious as thine, as highly aggravated in every circumstance as thy black transgressions, saved; completely saved to the uttermost, saved with an everlasting salvation; saved only through his obedience unto death.

Not one member of that vast assembly; not an individual in all that numberless throng, but what deserved the wrath of God to the uttermost. That wrath and indignation due to all, and every individual of them, fell at once upon the holy soul of thine immaculate Jesus. How ponderous the weight! how tremendous the burning curse! what power less than divine could rise superior to infinite guilt as did thy triumphant Jesus! It is done! guilt is no more! sin is for ever annihilated, respecting its dismal consequences to thee, O believer. Come, then, ye saints of the Most High, ye sinners redeemed from hell and destruction; come see the works of your conqueror, and say, "Is not this the true God and eternal life?"

Thus it was that your Boaz was made sin for you, that you might become the righteousness of God in him; and

thus it was by the power of his hand he finished transgression, made an end of sin; and, for you, brought in an everlasting righteousness; a righteousness in which ye shall shine in the brilliant assembly of paradise.

After such a splendid and memorable instance of our Redeemer's strength, there is little occasion to take up much of your time in speaking of his triumphs over death and the powers of darkness. Yet as such a heavenly truth should not be wholly omitted, I would just observe, that he entered the house of the strong man armed, spoiled him of his armour, and rescued the prey out of his potent hand. He bruised the head of Satan; he wounded the dragon that is in the sea; he spoiled principalities and powers, and openly displayed the trophies of his victory; for he ascended up on high, led captivity captive, re-entered the mansions of light, and received gifts for rebellious sinners.

Nor is the conquest of our adorable Jesus over the hearts and affections of his people to be wholly neglected; for this is one part of our salvation, which greatly tends to shew forth the excellency of his power. Beneath the attractive influence of his heavenly goodness, the most obdurate heart softens into tender relentings; the loftiest looks of the vain-glorious and self-conceited, sink down into profound humility and self-abhorrence; and the iron sinews in the necks of the most stout and rebellious, are bended into submissive obedience. In the day of his power the most backward are made willing to be saved by grace alone, as it reigns in Jesus through righteousness to eternal life.

2. As the name of Boaz is not inapplicable unto Jesus, we shall now consider his calling, "A husbandman." This great man, so eminent in Judah, and from whom their future kings descended, was it seems not above cultivating his inheritance himself, and superintending the affairs of husbandry. A noble instance of ancient simplicity, worthy to be imitated even by the moderns, as such an imitation would be an effectual curb upon that licentiousness which stains the annals of the present times.

The calling of Boaz is not inapplicable to the adorable Jesus, who also is a husbandman himself. He hath his field in which he delights; his vineyard where he drinks of the spiced wines, and of the juice of the pomegranate; over which he watches day and night, and waters it every

moment to render it fruitful. He has his garden of spices, of myrrh, and lilies, in which he delights to walk and ruminate on the loves of his spouse. He hath the times and seasons which he daily observes for the purpose of his husbandry, and which he improves to the great advantage of his church and people. He hath his sowing and planting times, in which he gives additional numbers to his believing church, and comforts to individuals. The time was that places which are now like a barren wilderness, were like a garden, well watered, and a field which God had blessed : places that are now like the garden of God for fruitfulness, were heretofore like the sandy desert, uncultivated, without any plants therein grafted by the hand of Zion's Husbandman. In particular churches, he hath his times of in-gathering and building up; in which times the work shall prosper, be in whose hands it will, and feeble worms shall surmount the highest mountains of opposition. With individuals it is the same at certain seasons; every circumstance produceth agreeable and comfortable effects; every sermon, every opportunity is owned to the soul's advantage and growth in grace.

But he hath also his weeding and cleansing times. When persecutions and public troubles come upon the church, they usually prove as a fan in the hand of the Son of God, by which he cleanseth his floor, and thoroughly purgeth his wheat. The tares are now rooted out and cast over the wall of the vineyard; hypocrites are returned back to their own master again. This is a scorching season that puts professors to the trial, and withers the stony ground hearers at the root; a wind that drives the chaffy hypocrite before it, and purgeth the thrashing-floor of our heavenly Boaz. Besides this, he hath his weeding, trying, and cleansing time, which he observeth in his conduct towards individuals, in which he proves them, and makes them know what is in their heart for their humiliation, and mortifying of them to sin and to the world. As a rank soil is the best nursery for tares, so plenty of earthly enjoyments are apt to foster vicious lusts; he sees meet to cut off the fuel, lest the fire should devour us. The greatest of men and best of saints have not escaped such humbling visitations. Job, the most patient man upon earth, was visited with accumulated sorrows, insomuch that one messenger of bad tidings came, as

it were, treading upon the heels of his fellow, till the worst that could happen was reported to him. David, the most pious of Jewish monarchs, the devoutest of militant saints, knew what it was to roar aloud by reason of his affliction, and to tremble at the hand that was upon him; yea, his heart and flesh were ready to faint, because of the depths through which he was called to pass.

That fervent, affectionate prophet, who bedewed the mount of God with sympathetic tears, found himself in such circumstances, that he cursed the day of his birth, and the messenger who reported his mother's delivery. Paul had his frequent buffetings, and Timothy his often infirmities, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Ruth went through these cleansing and weeding operations, before she began to take root and grow in the inheritance of the Lord. Attachment to carnal pleasure, love to her native country, veneration for the laws of the Gentiles, family and education prejudices were in measure rooted out before the Lord began to water her with the comforts of his house. So that ye need not think it strange, my brethren, concerning the fiery trial, as if some strange thing had happened unto you, for it is the lot of all the children of the kingdom to have tribulation in this world.

But he hath his watering and growing seasons in the Christian life, in which he sheds abroad the sweetness of his love, and causes all his paths to drop fatness to the souls of his people. Indeed all those trying and afflictive seasons serve to prepare for the consolation, and holy growth now under consideration, even as the severest winter frost is the best and most suitable introduction to the smiling spring. When he hath rifted the rocky heart by the voice of his rod, he utters the still voice of his consolation, and shews the glory of his grace. In proportion to which discoveries, our innate corruptions will be brought forth to view, and we shall grow downward in self-abasement and abhorrence, as well as upward in admiration of that fulness and excellency of grace revealed in the person and Gospel of Jesus. Churches also have their genial seasons, in which their Almighty Lord is pleased to water the souls of his people with heavenly influence under the word and ordinances; adds to their number, and builds them up in comfort and

holy communion. Then the Lord is as the dew to Israel, his people grow as the lily, and spread forth their roots as Lebanon, and the believing church becomes fruitful as Eden, the garden of God.

He, as the heavenly husbandman, hath also his ripening time, in which his fields are white for the harvest. Now the hoary head is a crown of glory, and the imbecility of stooping age is a proper emblem of the humility of the grown Christian. That description of old age given by the wise man, Eccl. xii. 3—5, seems picturesque of the ripening saint; "The keepers of the house shall tremble," because of the known dangers to which they are exposed from innumerable enemies without, and from that grand traitor, a wicked and deceitful heart within; a heart that may not be trusted, not for a moment trusted, because it is of the enemy's party, notwithstanding an inhabitant in our own bosoms. "The strong men shall bow themselves," under a sense of that body of death that is upon them. Every lofty look shall be brought low, under a sense of their own nothingness and insignificancy, ignorance and folly. "The grinders shall cease because they are few;" so that they shall find themselves incapable of receiving that nourishment, which the word of God actually imparts; that they are as much dependant on sovereign grace, for the least degree of refreshment, as for salvation itself; and as needy of Christ, as if they had never any prior communications from him. "All the daughters of music shall be brought low." The daughters of music shall still be there, but their songs shall be upon the solemn bass. In the more early days of Christianity, before man was sufficiently discovered to himself, the daughters of music might sing in elevated strains, and might even despise the humble notes of the bass, which is universally allowed to be the foundation of harmony; but alas! their instruments were frequently out of tune, and hung upon the willows, so that the voice of joy was not to be heard; for as they understood not the bass, their music subsided when they could not sing in more elevated lays. But when the soul is grown in the divine life, under the husbandry of Jesus, the daughters of music learn to descend to the use of the bass, and mingle judgment with all their songs of mercy. And many advantages do they find attending this transition, amongst which

are the following. They find that although there is less noise in the songs of the bass, there is greater solemnity, and more profound harmony than in their former premature triumphs. That although its solemn sound does not so exceedingly ravish the senses, it is more steady, uniform, and consistent; less liable to be out of tune, and more becoming a state of warfare.

"They shall be afraid of that which is high."—Young David could encounter any danger, overcome every difficulty however great; yea, he could break through a troop, or leap over a wall, because through God his mountain stood strong: but the aged Psalmist was taught not to exercise himself in great matters, nor in things too high for him. The young Christian, as well as the mere speculatist, can venture upon every high thing, and set himself to explain the hidden, the invisible things of God. But farther experience teacheth us that secret things belong to the Lord our God, and that only those that are revealed belong to us. So that from a sense of ignorance, and aptitude to err, there will be a fear of being too free with things that are not so clearly revealed, lest we should inadvertently eclipse that glory which we should wish to recommend to human esteem. Such a sense of personal weakness shall attend them, such a sense of utter incapacity for good, that the very "grasshopper shall be a burden." Thus the highest attainment of the Christian here below is to be reduced to nothing, that Christ may become all in all. This is the mark at which we ought to aim; this is the standard to which grace shall bring all its subjects, ere they are taken to their long, their exalted home. When the corn bends its weighty head towards the earth, it indicates the reaping time at hand, and the gathering of it into the husbandman's granary. The heart of man bowed down in low abasement, indicates a speedy dissolution, and heavenly exaltation and happiness fast approaching.

(3.) The affluent circumstances of this Hebrew are as worthy of note as either his name or calling, and as applicable to our adorable Redeemer. He is said to be "a mighty man of wealth;" not only "a man of wealth," but a "mighty man of wealth," to point out his abundance of riches. Jesus the Virgin's son, Jesus the sinner's friend, is also a mighty man of wealth, notwithstanding when so-

journing amongst men he had not where to lay his head; had not accommodations equal to the monsters of the desert, or to the winged inhabitants of the aerial regions. In a natural way he is a mighty man of wealth, for "the earth with all its fulness is his possession:" therefore saith he, Psal. l. 10—12. "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fulness thereof." Hence it is, that the whole family of heaven and earth subsist upon his bounty and munificence; for these all look unto him, and he giveth them their meat in due season, and satisfieth their mouths with good. The bread which feeds you, and the raiment which keeps you warm, yea, the very air which you breathe, and every other gift in nature, are all the fruits of your Redeemer's bounty. How vast! how mighty must that wealth be, out of which universal nature is fed, adorned, and clothed!

He is a mighty man of spiritual wealth also. With him are durable riches, and undecaying springs of comfort; for it hath pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell. The fulness of grace, of life, salvation, and glory. Of grace in covenant transactions; the promise of life for the elect was made to their federal Head, in whom there is all grace, to be exhibited in their behalf, in a way of redemption, adoption, and justification; all grace to be communicated to them in time for their sanctification, and preparation for glory, and all the manifestations of his glorious presence when time shall be swallowed up in eternity. "In him," saith the great apostle of the Gentiles, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge;" the riches of grace, of love, of mercy, and of glory. It is the whole work of Gospel ministers to publish the unsearchable riches of Christ. But the greatest, the most intelligent amongst them seeing but in part, and prophesying but in part, it follows, that after all the glorious testimonies that have been borne of him from the pulpit, and at the stake, that little, comparatively, of his excellency hath been known to the militant church. It is the whole business of every believer to be searching into the riches of his grace; and after all their strict inquiries, after all their attainments in experimental religion, when they come to the latest hour, they

are obliged to confess, that so ineffable is his worth, so exceedingly inestimable are his riches, that they know nothing at all of them in comparison of their reality; they being exceeding abundant above what we can think of; possessing heights infinitely transcending our highest reach; depths to a finite arm altogether unfathomable; lengths commensurate only with a divine duration; and breadths unspeakably more extensive than the immeasurable universe. Such are the riches of thy Redeemer, O my soul, that saints and angels may exert their utmost powers to reckon the sum of them, and numberless ages prosecute the delightful exercise; they shall still, ravishing thought! they shall still have before them an eternity of the same pleasing employment; grow every hour riper in knowledge of the riches of Jesus, and still at an infinite distance from comprehending them. Encouraging consideration! O my needy, my fearful soul! thou canst not possibly ask so much as thy loving friend can bestow, for he is a mighty man of boundless wealth.

(4.) The disposition of Boaz, evinced by his conduct, is worthy of our attention, being humane, benevolent, and bounteous; the very reverse of what is apparently the governing principles with mankind in general, of whom it is truly said, *All seek their own.* A character descriptive of none more than the people of this generation, of what rank or degree soever; *All seek their own*, is a general rule admitting but of few exceptions. Yet although few, there are, there always have been, some exceptions to it, in instances similar to the character before us; and wherever found, it is truly noble and godlike. God is great in his goodness, and good amidst all his essential greatness, and a faint adumbration of this divine character we have in Boaz, who was a mighty man of wealth; humane and bountiful, as he was mighty in riches. It was the custom of his countrymen, in aftertimes, to despise the inhabitants of the Gentile world, as a people whom God had cursed, and who had no inheritance in Jacob; but good Boaz took knowledge of Ruth notwithstanding she was a friendless stranger, and a helpless alien from the commonwealth of Israel. He very well knew her descent from Moab, the son of incest; but he despised her not for the intemperance and uncleanness of her otherwise great ancestor.

He not only inquired after her, and spake kindly to her, but he made her welcome to the free use of his field and table, without laying any the least restraint upon her conduct; directs her what course to pursue for safety, in abiding fast by his maidens; gives his young men charge concerning her, forbidding them at all to molest her: and even commands the reapers to drop handfuls on purpose for her; and at last sent her home to her mother with as much provision as she could carry; which at once discovered the benevolence of his heart, and the bounty of his hand. Unlike to Boaz are those who say to the needy and friendless, "Be ye warmed and clothed," but have not hearts benevolent enough to contribute in the least degree towards either. We wish you well, say some; we should be glad to see you out of these difficulties; we wish some who have it in their power, would make a point of assisting you; there are who could readily do it without exposing themselves to any inconvenience; but alas! as for us, our affairs are so circumstanced that it is out of our power to be of any service to you. Thus the farthest that the religion and benevolence of some people can carry them, in the works of charity, and labour of love, is to form such a denial as shall least expose themselves, or be offensive to the distressed suppliant. But Boaz, whose holy heart glowed with genuine benevolence, gives before she asketh, and equal to her present necessities. Let professors see and learn from his example, what the Lord our God requires of us in the works of mercy, as well as of justice and integrity. For it is not enough that a Christian is strictly honest, if he is not also merciful, tender, compassionate, and bountiful in proportion to what Divine Providence hath put into his possession.

This conduct of Boaz beautifully adumbrates the benevolent conduct of the blessed and adorable Jesus towards his needy church. For he also takes knowledge of his people who are all strangers by nature, *aliens* from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise; children of wrath even as others. He makes you welcome to his Gospel field; leaves you at large to range through all his institutions, and bids you be free with the grace of every promise; he requires on your part no other quality than your necessity. If you are athirst,

he bids you welcome to the waters; if hungry, to eat of the bread; if naked, to make free with his wardrobe; if sick, to apply to him for a cure; if guilty, for a pardon; if black and polluted, to wash in his blood and be clean. You say that you are black and not like unto the maidens of your Lord; he says that you are comely; all fair, without spot or blemish. You condemn yourself as worthy of the deepest hell, a sinner of the deepest dye; but he hath adjudged you to the highest heaven, to be for ever with himself.

During the whole of reaping season, he hath charged his reapers to drop handfuls on purpose for you, for all that glean after them without exception; that is, he hath given it in charge to his ministers that they should deal forth plenteous consolation from the word of revelation, and not reproach the poor and needy for making free with the declarations of grace, seeing it is not to foster sin, but to feed the cravings of an hungry soul. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem," is the language of our God; and shews that Gospel ministers are expected to speak in a language very different from that of Pharaoh's taskmasters, who charged the oppressed Israelites with idleness, and demanded the full tale of brick from the complainants. Therefore we are charged to Cry unto her, "that her warfare is accomplished;" to demand no conditions on her part, but to comfort her with the ministry of a free, a finished salvation. There is a singular beauty in that charge given to the prophet, Isa. xxxv. 3, 4. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, confirm ye the feeble knees; say to them of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: behold your God will come vengeance, God, a recompense, he will come and save you." The supplementary reading serving only to eclipse the glory of the text, I quote the original text without it, and would remark upon it, that it is admirably calculated to promote the consolation of saints, who find themselves to be poor and needy, and are therefore glad to glean in the field of grace and mercy.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands," who cannot work out their own salvation, by performing the conditions of the legal covenant; who cannot perform duty, resist sin, nor exercise grace at pleasure; but find that when they would do good, evil is present with them; that they are carnal, sold under sin, and that therefore the good which they

would do, is frequently left undone; and the evil which they hate is given into. For those people who can resist sin, perform duty, and exercise grace, can with no propriety be said to have weak hands, and therefore are no objects of our ministrations.

"Confirm ye the feeble knees," who cannot stand up under a sense of their sinfulness, whose hearts are overwhelmed with the weight of their iniquities, which have gone over their heads as a burden too heavy for them to bear, and whose spirit faints by reason of the handwriting of apprehended condemnation that is gone forth against them. Those feeble knees which cannot of themselves stand steady in the day of affliction, when the hand of a stripping God is stretched out, and the Almighty writes bitter things against them. Those who can reason themselves into a philosophic fortitude against every event, can in no sense be said to be people of feeble knees, and therefore no part of our business is with them. Neither are those who never were oppressed with a sense of sin, any way entitled to a part in the comforts which grace has prepared for those who tremble at the word of the Lord.

"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not." To them that are of a fearful heart, fearful of sinning against an infinitely holy God, and bringing guilt and condemnation upon their own souls, of being left to bring dishonour upon the people and good ways of God; fearful that their spots are not the spots of God's children, and therefore that Jesus hath no connexion with sinners of such a stamp as them; fearful that all their crosses are vindictive curses; their afflictions the effect of divine indignation, and just judgments on account of their sinfulness: "say to them, be strong;" the foundation of Christian strength lies in conscious weakness. O Jacob, know thyself to be but a worm, and thou shalt thresh mountains, and beat them to powder. Know that thou canst do nothing, and thou shalt do all things through Christ strengthening of thee.

"Your God will come, vengeance,"—Your God notwithstanding all your fearfulness, and unbelieving misgivings of heart. Your God in covenant relation, everlastingly the same. "Your God will come" although he hides his face from thee, and thou art troubled; although he tarries far beyond your expectation, and seems to weary out your

hopes, insomuch that you suppose yourself to be forgotten by him. He will come; his word is passed, and he will not revoke it; his promise is gone forth, and what shall hinder the egression of the grace promised? "He will come vengeance" upon thine enemies, into whose hands he seems to have given you up. You shall be safe, for when he shall be revealed in vengeance upon his enemies, he shall come as your God in new covenant relation. "God, a recompense:" God himself shall be to you a recompense; not of yours indeed, but of the Redeemer's obedience, your adorable substitute. "He will come and save you." When he shall come, come a recompense, come in vengeance, the salvation of his weak and fearful people shall be his object. What an amazing plenty of consolation does our divine husbandman scatter in his Gospel field for the use of hungry aliens?—Yea, sometimes he is pleased to load with soul-food as much as you can carry. To give such an overcoming sense of his pardoning love, as to make you sick of love, and cry out, Lord stay thy hand, thy servant is but an earthen vessel.

(5.) Of Boaz it is said, he was a kinsman of the family of Elimelech; and therefore according to the Jewish law, it was his province to redeem the alienated inheritance for Naomi and her daughter after the nearer kinsman had refused, or was become incapable of acting in character. Accordingly when the nearer kinsman actually refused, lest he should thereby mar his own inheritance, Boaz stepped forth openly before the elders of his people as Goel, or the near kinsman, and redeemed the alienated right of the inheritance of Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Chilion; and in purchasing of it, he became possessed of Ruth the Moabitess as the reward of his acting the part of a kinsman.

Jesus also is our Goel, or near kinsman, upon whom the right of redemption devolved, when the law, our first husband, became incapable of acting the kinsman's part. When by the sad misconduct of our Eden parent the inheritance was alienated, and we by our own act and deed had confirmed the alienation; our inheritance thus estranged, and the first in kindred incapable to redeem, our Goel, our near kinsman appears in the gate, to redeem

to himself both the inheritance and its natural and legal heirs.

Boaz was not only a near kinsman, but a kinsman of the family of Elimelech: so Jesus is not only our kinsman, but a kinsman of our own family, of the seed of Abraham, and David after the flesh, although in his divine nature God over all, blessed for evermore.

Elimelech signifies, according to some, "My God the King," which sense is truly applicable to Jesus, who is our kinsman, of the family of our God the King; being the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The only-begotten of the Father is our elder brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, therefore our kinsman, of the family of God our King. The word may be likewise rendered "the counsel of God," and in this sense is equally applicable to the case before us. Jesus is the highest object of the divine counsel, in which he was sealed and appointed. He is our kinsman who sits in the council of God, and therefore is our wonderful Counsellor. How vast and unspeakable that love by which man is taken up into God, and God condescends to dwell in man! Behold what manner of love is this! how boldly may we come before God, seeing we have a near kinsman sitting in his council: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

DISCOURSE VIII.

And Boaz said unto her, At meal time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.—Ruth ii. 14.

Having in the former discourse spoken concerning Boaz the husbandman, who so generously entreated this fair and worthy stranger to partake of the bounties of his hospitable table, and found that whatever reflects honour on this distinguished character, is found in a superlative degree in the amiable Jesus. We shall now endeavour to shew what likeness Ruth the Moabitess may bear to the

bride, the wife of the Lamb; that Shulamite, in whose mysterious person you behold the company of two contending armies. In describing this favourite damsel, we shall note—Her name—her kindred and former connexions—her late remarkable conduct—and her present deportment.

I. Her name, Ruth, hath been spoken to already as applicable to herself; I shall therefore consider it now as suitable unto every truly converted sinner, every real believer in the blessed Immanuel; for they also may be called watered, according to the signification of her name. It is remarkable how Old Testament names are adapted to personal characters, as if Divine Wisdom, foreseeing the conduct and after circumstances of the party, led to the fixation of the given name. It has been shewed what analogy there is between the name of Ruth, and the providential occurrences which attended her lot; we shall now consider the name as applicable to the child of grace.

(1.) Ruth, *made drunken*,* as most young converts are with sorrow and affliction. When Paul was convinced of the evil of his way, and found himself to be a real persecutor of Jesus of Nazareth, and in him of the cause of God, of truth, and of holiness, we read that he was three days and three nights without either eating or drinking, so intense was his sorrow and anguish. In ordinary cases it is even so. When the sin of the soul is brought to open light, and actual transgressions lay hold of the conscience; when the whole of the nature and conversation is viewed in the light of the changeless law, that abstract of infinite holiness, and the whole appears vile and abominable; when the awful consequences of a life of rebellion, and utter estrangement from God are discovered, none can tell but those who have felt it, what anguish lays hold on the heart, what tortures the horror of guilt brings upon the alarmed conscience. Sorrow invades the whole soul, and bears down every thinking faculty before it: sorrow for loss sustained; the loss of innocence; the loss of capacity for good; the loss of God and the divine favour; the loss of heaven, and all happiness both here and hereafter; sorrow for danger incurred; danger that makes the heart tremble to

* *Drunken*, the allusion here is to that of Isa. xxix. 9. *They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.*

reflect upon it; danger of being deprived of the pleasure of every enjoyment in this life, and instead of earthly felicity, to walk under the curse of a broken law; danger of dying an accursed death, and of being everlastingly miserable: miserable with regard to the company dreaded, devils and damned spirits; miserable respecting the place of abode, the lake, the sulphureous lake, which burneth for evermore: and miserable in the keen sensations of growing anguish, when time shall be no more, and when all is unspeakable, immeasurable eternity. This is experience that will make the stoutest heart to give way, and the loftiest look to descend into the dust; that will make the most daring to cry out, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" and the obdurate heart breathe, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Such a state of soul made David roar from the bitterness of his spirit, and water his couch with repentant tears, whilst he cried after mercy in a sovereign way, according to the loving-kindness of his gracious Maker.

(2.) Ruth, "watered and filled;" very applicable to believers, who are watered with the heavenly influence of grace, and filled with the fruits of the Holy Ghost. By nature we are dry as the scorched mountains of Gilboa, and barren as the Lybian sands. So wild, so uncultivated, and so unfruitful is degenerate man, that by nature, touching every good work, all are reprobates; yea, even enemies in our hearts by wicked works against God: to whom the language of the natural man is, "Depart from me, O Lord, I desire not the knowledge of thy law, I will not have thee to reign over me; for I have loved idols and after them I will go. I will delight in the fatness of my own olive, and rejoice in the blood of my own vine. Is not this great Babel that I have built for the house of my kingdom, and for the glory of my majesty?" But the time, the set time to favour being come, heavenly influence descends from above and waters the soul; the Comforter comes down as a spirit of conviction, ploughs up the fallow ground of the heart, and prepares the soul for bringing forth fruits meet for repentance; fills with the spirit of faith, of love, and holiness. It is recorded of Stephen, that he was a man "full of faith" and of the Holy Ghost. What is true of the greatest of saints, is also in his measure true of every believer.

Full of faith, and could not be shaken, or tempted to

swerve from the profession of his faith; steadfast and immoveable, respecting that one thing needful, being determined to know nothing in this world, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Such is the case of every believer, in his better frames, respecting faith of the operation of God. Likewise, at times, he is so filled with love, that he knows not how to express his grateful sentiments. His cry is, "O Lord, how do I love thy law! It is my delight all the day long. What shall I do to praise, to honour and glorify my lovely, my adorable Saviour: his mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely; he is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand." Filled with such a sense of his loving kindness, as to be overcome with the transporting pleasures of his presence, that with the spouse you cry out, "Stay me with flaggons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love."

II. Her kindred, and former connexions come next under our notice.

A Moabitess, a stranger, the daughter of strangers, whose patriarch was the son of incest, begotten by Lot in a fit of drunkenness on his own daughter, therefore there was nothing respectable in her ancestry. She was by nature of the wild, uncultivated race of idol worshippers, accustomed to bow down to the vanities of the Gentiles, and therefore a child of wrath even as others; afar off from God, and even darkness itself. But these connexions were now dissolved; she was plucked off from her native stem, and grafted into the vine of Israel; she was brought nigh by the drawing power of immortal love; out of darkness into the marvellous light of the kingdom of God.

She was not a virgin, but the widow of Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, who died in the land of Moab, before she had any intention of quitting her native country. The spouse of Jesus also was married to a previous husband, the legal covenant, which must be dead to the sinner, and the sinner dead to it, before he can heartily approve of salvation by, and marriage with the Son of God. Mahlon, her former husband, signifies "a song," which is answerable to the law in its original constitution, and to man in his primitive purity and holy obedience. When man at first dropped from the Creator's hand, he was like unto all the rest of the divine workmanship, perfect and good, capa-

ble of the most consummate conformity to the moral law, and in every tittle of obeying his Maker's pleasure. Whilst he continued in his primitive rectitude, and spotless obedience, he could rejoice in the works of his own hands, and sing of access to the sacred presence, in virtue of his own performances. He obeyed, and he reaped the fruit of his doings, which fruit was joy and confidence in God. If they have great peace who but love the law, what holy joy, what sacred pleasure must have been the result of perfect obedience to its demands! Whilst the law remained inviolate, it was the song of sinless man; notwithstanding, in his lapsed condition, it is to him the minister of condemnation. Who can reflect on that mutual intercourse between God and Adam before the fall, without admiring the felicity of human innocence, and making the sad comparison between our own state, and that of our great ancestor? The Lord God walked with Adam, and freely deigned to converse with him; yea, Jehovah vouchsafed to consult with man concerning the names of his creatures. But O man! where art thou now? from whence hast thou fallen, O my instable parent? Alas! Adam, dost thou flee from thy Maker's presence, not long ago in thy sight so delightful, so amiable? still dost thou flee? wilt thou never return, Adam? ask not the cause; for sin is born into the human world: moral evil is become perfect, and has ruined primitive integrity. Unhappy parent! what awful ruin hast thou brought upon thy natural descendants. My God! how great is thy forbearance, that still prolongs the existence of self-ruined and rebellious mankind! It would have been equitable and just with thee to have cut them down whilst shuddering in the lonely thicket, and denounced irremediable ruin upon the whole delinquent race. But thou art God, whose purposes are unalterable, and whose loving kindness is not subject to any change whatever: thy counsel stands for ever fast, and thou wilt do all that is in thine own heart.

Mahlon signifies, secondarily, *infirmity;* which is also answerable to man under a broken law, which law is become weak through the flesh to save any that come unto it. Sin having entered and obtained dominion over man, it disabled him to perform any part of true obedience. This imbecility of man rendered the law incapable to save; as

in its original constitution it never could approve of any thing inferior to consummate perfection. It is weak, indeed, in point of the sinner's salvation; but all its weakness comes through the infirmity of our flesh, who by nature have lost the power both to will and to do of his heavenly, his good pleasure. Do you question the truth of this description of fallen man? ask then your own hearts what part of the divine pleasure you can perfectly perform? what branch of practical godliness you can take delight in, before grace is pleased to form your hearts anew? The more you try to search your own hearts, and bring forth to view the springs of action in yourselves, the more shall you be convinced of the affecting truth, that "in man there dwells no good thing," but that his whole "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and that "all the imaginations of the thoughts of man's heart are only evil continually," ever since that awful period on which it might be said, "that all flesh had corrupted his way," and "we all as sheep went astray, turning every one to his own way." Bring then the tempers and dispositions of your hearts forth to the trial; forth to be tried by the infallible records of infinite holiness, for by that you must ultimately stand or fall. If weighed in that impartial balance, O my soul! who shall not be found wanting?

By this impartial balance your every action, whether secret or open, must be weighed; it is virtuous, as it agrees with that only unerring standard of virtue and religion; or vicious, as it deviates from its sacred dictates. It was a sense of this that drew forth that remarkable confession from the mouths of the apostolic church, "In many things we offend all," Jam. iii. 2. We saints, believers, quickened by the grace of God; we evangelists, preachers of the Gospel, and apostles of Jesus; we offend, all offend, offend in many things; not only in time past, but we *now* offend, even in our regenerated state. Now, if the apostolic saints, favoured with privileges so exalted, were constrained to make such an humbling confession, would it not be the most daring presumption for sinners, who never felt the power of renewing grace, to flatter themselves that their obedience to the law is perfect? would it not be the most diabolical delusion thus to flatter ourselves, even after conversion, seeing an infallible pen has testified, "that if any

man say he hath no sin, he deceiveth himself, and the truth is not in him."

All mankind being thus concluded under sin, and incapable of that which is truly and spiritually good, it follows that the law is weak through the flesh, utterly weak to save any individual of the human race; so that by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified or saved. The reason of this proposition is obvious in the highest degree. The law having required perfect, universal, and eternal obedience, in the creation state of man, was it now to abate in its demands proportionably to man's incapacity to obey, it would be mutable, *and therefore not a transcript of the mind of the Deity.* Every deviation from the law being truly and properly sin, it follows that the law would be inconsistent with itself, if it could pass by any, the least sin, without ample atonement being made for its honour: having declared that he who keepeth the whole law, and offendeth but in one point, is deemed guilty of the whole. It would be unworthy of God to say, and not to do; but he hath spoken the word, and who shall disannul it? he is of one mind, and therefore liable to no mutation.

Mahlon, her former husband, was dead before she came to glean in the field of Boaz. It is likely that during his lifetime she was under no necessity of stooping so low as to glean after another man's reapers. But now Mahlon was dead, she was fain to live upon the bounty of another, however unworthy she might deem herself of being numbered among his maidens. It is just so with the perishing sinner, he must be dead to the law, and the law dead to him, before he can live with pleasure on the bounty of Jesus. Whilst the first, the natural husband lives; whilst there are the smallest remains of hope by the law, it is impossible that the soul can cordially submit to the righteousness of Christ, and embrace salvation upon Gospel terms, without money and without price. The inspired apostle of the Gentiles, beautifully states the doctrine under consideration, Rom. vii. 1—3. "Know ye not brethren (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? for the woman which hath an husband, is bound by the law to her husband, as long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free from the law of her husband. So then

if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that ye should bring forth fruit unto God."

Here the law is represented as the natural husband, to whom mankind in general are married; and from whom there must be a total divorce, before we can embrace and live upon Christ, as is clear from the case of the husband and wife specified in the text. The woman cannot be married to another man, till after the death of her husband.

By nature, all our dependance is upon, all our hopes centre in, the law; nor do our expectations cease till beaten out from every subterfuge, and that is dead wherein by nature we are held. Whilst we place our hope in any sense in the law, it has full dominion over us, as the husband hath over the wife, and requireth perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience: but its authority over us ceaseth the moment that by grace our hope finds no farther foundation in the legal covenant.

When all hopes by the law of works are cut off; when the sandy foundation is washed away by the rising floods, and the fabric reared at such vast expense becomes a general ruin; when every refuge of lies is torn to pieces by the storm awaked in the conscience, the poor dismayed sinner begins to look abroad for some suitable ground of dependance; no longer now being able to find in himself any good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. Thus dead to the law, by the body of Christ, ye are brought to consent to the suit of the Son of God; having nothing wherewith to pay, ye are at last content to be frankly and freely forgiven, and rejoice to be justified as altogether unworthy and ungodly. Then can ye, or at least ye may say, with our holy apostle, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I may live unto God." This is the first and greatest end of your death to the law, and marriage to him that was raised up from the dead, that ye might bring forth fruit unto God. This death to the law, on your part, implies the death of the law to you-ward, respecting its autho-

rity in form of a covenant; Christ having become the end of it for righteousness to all that believe.

There is an amazing force and beauty in the expression of his becoming the end of the law for his people. The law has dominion over the sinner to the very moment of his closing with Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, and from that very moment forward, ceaseth to be his lawful *lord.* The avenger of blood might pursue the manslayer to the very gates of the city of refuge, but he might not touch him after he got within the gates. We may suppose the avenger in hot pursuit of the slayer to the very gates of the city, and seeing him safely enter within the gate, thus expostulate with himself: "So far as I was warranted by divine appointment, I pursued him; had I been able to come up with him within my own dominion, I had sacrificed him to my fury. But I can go no farther. The city gate is the end of my authority, therefore I drop my pursuit, as my vengeance cannot reach him within the city walls." Will it be too bold to suppose the language under consideration to be something akin to the following: "Whilst he was under my dominion, I cursed him with indignation; whilst he sought salvation by obedience to me, I scourged him with many stripes; but now he has taken sanctuary where I cannot reach him, under a covert through which my fury cannot penetrate. He is safe in him upon whom I have no farther demands; in him who has honoured me to the uttermost, and must be safe under such an honourable protection, where I leave him for ever blessed."

O sirs, look narrowly to the spirit of your obedience, and ground of your expectations. Beware of dividing your dependance between Moses and Christ: the dominion of the latter begins precisely where that of the former ceaseth. Ye may sooner intermingle noonday sunshine, and the gloom of midnight, than divide yourselves between the law and Gospel in point of dependance. The law must be dead to you, and you to the law, before you can live upon the righteousness and atonement of Jesus; before ye can perform one action acceptable to an infinitely holy God. If you have the least dependance upon your obedience to the law, ye are bound to fulfil it perfectly; look therefore to be damned for the least deviation from the purity of its tenor. On the other hand, if you have no ground of hope

but the perfect obedience of Christ; no spring of consolation but his bleeding wounds, ye have nothing to fear at the hand of a relentless law; it may storm, and threaten you with what it would do were you under its dominion, like the disappointed avenger before the gates of the city of refuge, but ye are safe. The inhabitants of the rock may sing of their safety within the gates of salvation.

III. Having considered her name, her kindred, descent, and former husband, we shall now attend to her late and present conduct, as something akin to that of the truly gracious soul whom God has drawn to the love of Jesus.

1. She clave fast to her mother-in-law, with full purpose to abide by her, in all circumstances whatever, resolving that nothing but death should divide them.

"Entreat me not to leave thee, for where thou goest, I will go: thy people shall be my people, thy God my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried:"—similar to the resolution of the believer under divine anointings, to cleave to the militant church even to death, as has been exemplified in the first discourse of this history. I shall therefore at this time attend,

2. To her present deportment, which eminently discovered a grateful and humble frame of mind, becoming one who is brought to a sense of the baseness of her original, and alienation from the commonwealth of Israel. She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground; expresseth her wonder at being taken notice of by this generous stranger, and freely confesseth herself unlike to his handmaidens of his own kindred and people. His venerable presence struck her with awe, that she could not but do him reverence: his generosity filled her with wonder, that a friendless, desolate stranger should be thought worthy to share in his munificence; and the sight of his retinue filled her with humility and self-abasement. So it is with the believer, who has the same experiences respecting his heavenly and adorable kinsman.

(1.) His adorable presence strikes them with awe and reverence, that they, like Ruth, fall to the ground with their faces to the earth, and wonder that they should find grace in his sight.

(2.) His generosity and his retinue lay them low in their own eyes, with their hands upon their mouths, and their

mouths in the dust before him, confessing to be less than the least of all, and unlike to the meanest character in his train.

(1.) His adorable presence strikes them with awe and reverence, that, like Ruth, they fall to the ground, and bow themselves with their faces to the earth, wondering that they should find grace and favour in his sight. Nothing has such a tendency to lay the soul low, in the very dust before God, as the displays of his grace, love, and transcendently excellent and venerable presence. O how low does this bring the lofty looks of aspiring and ambitious man! at this the highest mountain sinks down into a valley, and the tall cedar of Lebanon into the meanest and most contemptible shrub.

Job retained his integrity, and thought himself justified in so doing, whilst conversing only with his friends and equals; but when God himself in the person of the Logos appeared, though in a cloud, and spake from the midst of the whirlwind, Job is all humility and attention. Here his becoming reply to the divine interrogatories, chap. xl. 4, compared with chap. xlii. 3. 5, 6. "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. I have uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The presence of Infinite Holiness brings all the secret defilement of his heart to open view, so that his integrity departs as a non-entity, and nothing but vileness appears in his eye; therefore he lays his hand on his mouth, he abhors himself, lays his mouth in the earth, and repents in dust and ashes before him in whose presence there is no room for created excellence to appear. O sirs! the nearer you are brought to Jesus, the lower you will lie in your own esteem, and the deeper will be your sense of your own pollutions.

It was at a time when God had, in a particular manner, made himself known to David his servant, that in the sacred presence he thus worshippeth in humble strains of holy gratitude: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken

also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant," 2 Sam. vii. 18—20. From which passage two things are apparent. First, that a sense of mercy is the spring of humble gratitude. David was overwhelmed with a sense of the divine goodness, and was struck with its sovereignty, and independence upon human merit; "for what am I? or what is my house?" saith he. Secondly, David does not abound in words, in the expression of his grateful affection; he wanted words to express his inward sensations; and found himself obliged to leave it with God, to read the thankfulness of his heart, in its inexpressible workings: "And what can David say more, O Lord God? for thou knowest thy servant." From whence we are taught this comfortable and instructive truth, that the more our hearts are overcome with thankfulness to the God of love for the blessings of our salvation, we may be the less abundant in words, by which we can express the grateful sensations of the soul.

Another instance we have of the humbling nature of the divine manifestations of the Redeemer's presence in the case of Isaiah, in the sixth chapter of his prophecy. This holy, this eloquent, and evangelic prophet, was laid under the deepest sense of his nothingness and defilement, not by any immediate affliction that was upon him, but by the revelation of the Lord of Hosts, Isa. vi. 2—4. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts! the whole earth is full of his glory! And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the whole earth was filled with smoke." This courtly prophet had been accustomed to the magnificence of earthly monarchs, and could have beheld the swell of human grandeur without emotion; but when he beholds the glory of Zion's gracious Monarch, he is overwhelmed with its unsufferable blaze. He cries out, ver. 5, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst

of a people of unclean lips." But why so alarmed, thou venerable prophet? thou wast such before when fear was at a distance from thee; neither thine own lips, nor the lips of the people with whom thou dwellest, are more unclean than they were before: therefore why so alarmed? why so shocked at thine own pollution? "O! mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" If so, thou hast had an insupportable discovery of thine own utter wretchedness and pollution, and I wonder not at the agitation of thy spirit.

These may serve as a specimen of the humbling nature of divine discoveries. I shall therefore now,

(2.) A little note the humble confession of Ruth, as being unlike unto the handmaidens of Boaz. Ver. 13. "Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord, for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine own handmaidens." Ver 10. "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" The train of our adorable Immanuel is is so august, so glorious by his communicated grace, that the poor believer cannot easily be brought to consider himself amongst the happy number. All the holy angels, all the glorified saints, day and night attend upon his pleasure; ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him, and thousands of thousands fly at his command. The patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the noble army of martyrs, and all the spirits of just men made perfect, swell his brilliant train; and how can I, who am so black and swarthy, so wretched and sinful, be numbered amongst company so honourable? Whence is it to me that my Lord should regard me with favour, and permit me to approach thy sacred presence, and encourage me to feed on the bounties of thy grace? It must indeed be astonishing, when the sinner, expecting nothing but destruction, equivalent to the demerit of his sins, finds himself pardoned fully, justified freely, and admitted into the Gospel church to partake of all the privileges of his children. What thankfulness must he not feel in his heart! what heavenly joy must transport his soul! and how will he feel his desire incited to seek after the honour and glory of the Redeemer, his Lord and Master, in the use of all

appointed means. O God, I will love thee! I will praise thee! for although thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.

DISCOURSE IX.

And Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. —Ruth ii. 14.

THE names of the parties having been opened and applied to Gospel purposes, in the preceding discourses, we shall now attend to the invitation itself. "At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar," which we find to be very capable of a spiritual, evangelical improvement, such as, if divinely blessed, may be an incentive both to our comfort and holiness. With this view, I shall consider it as containing the three following branches:

I. "At meal-time come thou hither."

II. "Eat of the bread."

III. "Dip thy morsel in the vinegar."

I. "At meal-time come thou hither." The servants of Boaz had their meal-times, their times of refreshment and rest, in which they retired from their several departments in labour to the place appointed, and fed upon their master's provision. At meal-time their honourable lord disdained not to join them, and fed upon the same food which was provided for his reapers; a beautiful instance of ancient simplicity, the very reverse of modern ambition, voluptuousness, and dissipation. Labouring men have need of rest and refreshment, and unto the labourer they yield an agreeable sweetness. Even the bed of down is hard and uneasy to the children of sloth and indolence; and to the voluptuary the most tasteful viands yield no pleasing relish: but to the labouring man who comes at meal-time, prepared for eating by labour-procured hunger, every bitter thing is sweet, and the coarsest bed is soft and agreeable. The voluptuary spends his time to procure the brutal pleasures of eating and drinking, but his pursuits are baffled by idle-

ness and plenty; whilst the rustic swain, upon his humble allowance, feeds with the keenest gust of which sense is capable. When the man of pleasure can by no means procure the due visitations of sleep, even upon his bed of down, the country ploughman enjoys all its charms upon humble chaff, or the coarsest feathers. He comes with a healthy hunger to his plain repast, and wearied by the labours of the day, to his smiling consort and homely pillow, and is gratified by all the pleasures of vigorous sensation.

The church, the believing church, as the family of our divine husbandman, the servants of our holy and adorable Master, have their meal-time, on which they feed in company on such provision as infinite bounty has made for them. The divine Master has appointed one day in seven as his own day, and which is a season of feeding. The Lord's day is so nominated, not because it is a day of receiving ought at the hands of his people, but because it is a day on which he calls them together to display unto them the bounties of his goodness. The remark which I sometimes make cannot be too often repeated: the Christian religion does not consist in a bringing to God, but in a receiving all from his sovereign mercy in Christ Jesus: and the religion of antichrist, whatever form or name it assumes, consists essentially in a bringing to God, instead of receiving all from him in a way of free favour.

Boaz associated with his servants at meal-time, as is apparent from the words of our text, "He reached her parched corn, and she did eat." Jesus is also with his family in a peculiar manner on his own day, sitting at his table, and causing our spikenard to send forth the smell thereof, or feeding the souls of his saints in the banquetting house of love. You who now hear me can recollect many instances of your being sweetly regaled with the delicacies of paradise in the house of God. Ye have found many a banquetting table in the house of prayer; the cup of trembling has been graciously taken away, and the nectarine cup of Gospel consolation has been administered in its stead. Perhaps, like a weary reaper, ye have come hither at meal-time, heavy laden with a sense of guilt and pollution, groaning under a sense of your mental languor, scarcely daring to hope for any soul repast; yet, ere you are aware, your souls were raised by the precious allurements of your

Redeemer's voice, saying unto you, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;" and in an instant ye were become like the chariots of a willing people: ye were made on that day to sing of his salvation, "O God, we praise thee! for although thou wast angry with us, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest us." Then were ye like giants refreshed with new wine; your hearts were glad as with espousal endearments, and your only boast was of God your Saviour.

Every ordinance of God is a meal-time to the needy believer, and its use stands in connexion with covenant promise. These are the vehicles of his provisions, which he has promised to bless to the satisfaction of the poor and needy; with which, as with good things, he filleth the longing soul of the hungry believer. Every servant of God has a right to come hither to the ordinances at meal-time; the duty is general, and is enjoined upon all that would eat of the bread: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the waters!" Ho! every hungry sinner, come hither at meal-time! take and eat without money and without price. You cannot expect to eat, unless you attend at meal-time; at meal-time therefore come hither, eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar.

Many you shall find with visage meagre, and with the drawling voice of languor, complaining of their leanness: O my leanness, my leanness! who, if duly attended to, will be found to neglect coming hither at meal-time; or, if they do come hither at meal time at all, they come with such listless steps, and such sickly appetites, that their coming answers little to the purpose of soul nutrition; therefore their leanness and barrenness still continue. That heart which is overcharged with wordly concerns, is no way likely to profit much by the sacred institutions of the Gospel. How shall the corn of heaven grow amongst thorns and briars of worldly cares?

The coming together of the servants at meal-time, leads me to observe, that all Gospel ordinances ought to be administered on the Lord's day in the assemblies of his worshipping people. The master of the field has an undoubted right to direct his own reapers: he that provides the sustenance of his servants, surely may appoint the times and

manner of their refreshment. There is one ordinance of the blessed Gospel that appears to me of great importance, and and is notwithstanding treated with great indignity: I hope I shall be excused, if I should even express my abhorrence of privately smuggling people through the ordinance of baptism into the Christian church; yet both by baptists and pedobaptists, this is sometimes allowed. Without entering at all into the controversy between ourselves, and our esteemed brethren of a contrary persuasion, I shall take the liberty of observing, that with both parties the ordinance of baptism is treated as inferior to other Gospel institutions, and frequently is administered on a working day, in a private manner; whereas it being confessedly of divine appointment, and an ordinance of Jesus Christ, it ought to be administered on his own day in the assemblies of his church; at least where this can be done with any tolerable convenience, it certainly must have the preference, as by far the most eligible, and most likely to answer the ends for which it was instituted.

But to return to the thread of my discourse, it may be observed, that if the reapers are laborious, they will have a healthful appetite; and if hungry, they will be glad to come hither at meal time. They will be so far from being careless in the use of means, that they will find it difficult to hold out to meal-time. You will not find them entering the place of worship when service is almost over, but waiting in time to hear what the Lord our God will say unto them; waiting with as diligent attention as they watch for the morning. Their waiting will be far from formal and customary, and, with the Psalmist, their very souls will wait; wait for God and the visits of his grace, encouraged by the word on which their hope is placed: glad to embrace every opportunity of soul refreshment, such as mutual converse about the things of God, social, family, or private prayer: glad when athirst to go to the vessels and drink that which the young men, the prophets and apostles, have drawn. More especially, in seasons of great afflictions, when the sun of temptation beats vehemently upon them, will they seek unto the word with that good man, who declares that he had certainly perished in his afflictions, if the law of the Lord had not been his peculiar delight. So then at meal-

time, if hungry come hither: all that thirst, come ye to the waters; all that hunger, come to the banquet of free loving-kindness. Ye are the guests which wisdom hath invited; for you her table is prepared, and her wine is mingled; behold, all things are ready, and ye shall be welcome to come hither at meal-times. This leads me to the

II. Particular under this head, which is, "Eat of the bread." "Come thou hither at meal-time, and eat of the bread." Coming hither at meal-time will answer but little purpose, if we eat not of the bread prepared. Indeed, if we are an hungered, we shall need but little invitation to eat, if a covered table is presented to us; on the contrary, it would be no small degree of mortification for us in such a case, to see others plenteously to feed upon nutritive and inviting delicacies, whilst we ourselves were shut out from partaking with them.

"Eat of the bread." Here is a generous and free invitation, to use the means of sustenance with cheerfulness and freedom; it is freely provided, freely given, and thou art perfectly welcome. The bread of life was early provided, even from everlasting: it is the provision of unmerited, of infinite goodness; and as it was freely provided, it is as freely given: for nothing could excite the Most High to give his Son as the bread and spring of spiritual and eternal life, but his own ineffable loving-kindness: he only is the bread of God; he only is the Christian's life; and he is fully and freely given to all who see their need of such a Saviour: to him is every sensible sinner welcome; and from his salvation shall none be turned empty away. Personal unworthiness is here no reasonable impediment, otherwise none had ever partook of the bread of heaven, seeing all are unworthy, because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; besides, we have the unalterable promise of him who cannot lie, "That of all who come to him, he will in no wise cast out." How groundless then the unbelieving fears of many sensible souls, lest they should be turned away from the banquetting-house of Jesus, under the tremendous weight of the deserved anathema. But know this of a truth, it is the rich and only the rich, whom he sends empty away; for he feedeth the hungry with the good things of his gracious kingdom.

"Eat therefore of the bread;"—ask not if it was designed

for such as thee: it is certain that bread is prepared for the hungry; if hungry, it was prepared for thee. Ruth, with all her relative and personal disadvantages, ate of the bread, and was sufficed, and left. Nothing is more common than for the awakened sinner, alarmed with a sense of his own danger, earnestly to long for an interest in Gospel salvation, and to live upon Jesus, the bread of heaven. But, ah! the misgivings of an unbelieving heart lure him aside from his true happiness, and add to the burden of his weary mind, by vainly prying into the inscrutable decrees of eternal Wisdom. Here you shall find such unnecessary questionings as these: Am I among the number of his people for whom he died? I heartily approve of his great salvation; but have I any interest in it? He is just such a Saviour as I stand in need of; but is he designed a Saviour for such a sinner as me? Such questionings are not only in themselves altogether unnecessary, but are contrary to the genius of the Gospel, and dishonouring to God and his Son Jesus. Jesus derives his name of Saviour from the relation in which he stands to sinners; and sovereign mercy in the Deity always hath human misery for its only object; therefore if thou wast not a wretched sinner, thou couldst not have hope in the merciful Saviour. As the case stands, there is a perfect suitableness between Christ and thee: thy misery is exactly suitable to his mercy, and gives it an opportunity to exert itself in its most unlimited scope; and this boundless mercy is in all respects adequate to thy most extensive wretchedness.

All that is requisite then to the freest use of Christ, and all his salvation, is to know thy need of such a one as a Saviour. If thou art a condemned sinner, he is thy all-sufficient Saviour. If thou hast nothing of thine own on which thou canst rely, he is thy portion for ever, and the Lord thy righteousness and strength. Is he therefore held out unto thee as the bread of God and of life? "eat of the bread," without inquiring for whom it was prepared; it is enough that thou art in a famishing condition to encourage thee to eat of the bread. Whatsoever is set before thee, in the ministry of the word, eat, asking no questions for conscience' sake. Jesus, with all his grace and salvation is set before thee, and by sovereign grant thou, though the vilest of sinners, hast an indubitable right to embrace

both the one and the other, to make free with Christ and all his unsearchable riches; to trust in him as almighty to deliver and save to the very uttermost, the most abominable sinner that trusts in his mercy. Talk not, then, deluded soul, of thine unworthiness, for there are none in heaven more worthy in themselves, than thou art with all thy vileness. Say not, I am a stranger of an uncircumcised nation, descended from a race of evil doers; I am of a swarthy complexion, and not fit to appear among the family of God: but if hungry, eat of the bread.

Eat of the bread, be sure it is bread on which you feed: beware of feeding upon chaff or ashes. That heart is deluded and turned aside which feeds upon ashes; and they are swine who can be satisfied with husks. It was not in his father's house, but in a land of strangers, that the poor prodigal would have been glad to fill his belly with husks that swine did eat. God provides bread, the staff of life, for his household; whilst the servants of sin and Satan are put off with swine's provision. Look carefully to what you eat; see that it be bread, of the kidney of the wheat. Every thing that springs from self or the world, is but chaff or corruption; but the promises and declarations of grace are wholesome bread by which ye shall live for ever.

Eat of the *bread, plain* bread, and not dishes elegantly dressed and richly sauced; bread, the staff of life, apt to nourish, without gendering humours disagreeable or dangerous, or in any wise injurious to the constitution: bread upon which there is no likelihood of your surfeiting as you possibly might upon more tasteful viands. Of all the surfeits ye hear of, of all the diseases which abound, none proceed from the eating of the bread, and dipping of the morsel in the vinegar. Surfeiting and disease have their spring in practices very different from these. The full soul will indeed be apt to consider plain bread as a very coarse entertainment; but my concern is not at present with him, seeing the honey itself is nauseous and loathsome to such: it is to the hungry that my message is sent; to you to whom every bitter thing is sweet; and unto the hungry, the plainest healthful bread will be a welcome provision.

Our Gospel is equally plain and nutritive: so plain, that it is foolishness to the wise philosophic Greek; so nutritive,

that whosoever feeds upon its provision, shall live for ever. In my view of things, it could not be half so majestic, if it was not altogether so plain: its plainness and simplicity suit with none but the hungry and needy; and its majesty gives full scope to the most extensive powers of the human understanding. The Gospel of our salvation is so constructed, that it can receive no embellishment from human wisdom and science: its spirit is a spirit of independency, and can incorporate with nothing earthly: its noble and beauteous structure is equally adapted to give relief unto every necessitous person, to humble, abase, and mortify the self-sufficient. Of course it tends in itself to thwart every view of the natural mind, and is in itself that cross which is equally an offence to the unregenerate, and the believer's glory and rejoicing. Here is nothing to nourish pride or tickle our self-conceit. The Gospel strips the creature of all its excellency, and lays the whole race of mankind low on a perfect level, in one common ruin before God, and leaves no room for so much as whispering* one boast of either willing or doing.

But plain and mortifying as the Gospel is, there is no other scheme of life revealed. You must either eat or die: no other alternative is known in the volume of revelation but, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." If you eat, ye shall live for ever; if ye eat not of the bread, the whole creation cannot save you from endless despair, and consummate ruin for ever and ever. May God give you a healthful appetite, and teach you to feed upon the bread of his kingdom, the food of his favoured children, that ye may escape the horrors which await the foes of the immaculate Redeemer! You who eat of the bread, and drink of that which the young men have drawn, are blessed indeed, for ye shall never die; your food is the spring of eternal life, and ye shall live for ever with him from whom ye derive your life and all its nourishment. But,

III. A third thing is contained in the words, which I know to be very familiar to many of you, "Dip thy morsel in the vinegar." Our holy Boaz hath indeed provided ample

* *Whispering one boast.*—It is indeed unusual for boasters to speak in whispers: but there is such a thing as a self-righteous person speaking privately his own commendation, that which he has not courage enough openly to declare to the multitude, and to this is the allusion here.

provision for the sustenance of his people, but every morsel must be dipped in the vinegar: such is the purpose of infinite Wisdom, and every saint shall find its fulfilment. To explain a thing so well known as vinegar, might well be deemed superfluous; but as its medicinal uses are less understood, it may not be amiss a little to amplify them, in order the better to accommodate our object to Gospel uses.

It is of excellent use in all kinds of inflammatory and putrid distempers, in all ardent, bilious, pestilential, and malignant fevers, acting as a certain and very powerful sudorific, which is certainly the most likely way of conquering those diseases, by driving the venom from the heart to the surface of the body.* It is used also as an excellent antidote against all contagious distempers whatever, either by washing the body of the healthy therein, sprinkling the chamber of the sick, or pouring it in the room upon a burning brick:† taken inwardly it greatly promotes concoction, braces up the relaxed fibres of the stomach, and of course helps the appetite. In weakness and relaxation of the nerves, palpitation of the heart, and all hysterical and hypochondrical complaints, it is of great use, either taken inwardly, or applied to the mouth and nostrils. So that from its great force in medicine, it is not impossible that its plenteous use among the ancients might, in the hand of the Almighty, be one means of promoting their longevity and healthful frame of body.

But to return to my principal design, I may observe, that the people of God are indeed fed with bread of the kidney of the principal wheat, and no expense is thought too great for their provision; but then such is their constitution and habit, that during their minor state, it is necessary that every morsel should be dipped in the vinegar: this regimen is apparently necessary, for the preservation of soul healthfulness and prosperity. The paschal lamb was never, at any time, to be eaten without bitter herbs: nor is the bread of mercy to be eaten but as dipt in the vinegar of judgment, so that the one gives an agreeable, qualifying relish to the other.

Of the vinegar in which thy morsel must be dipt, O believer, there are two kinds, equally salutary, equally necessary.

* Vid. New Dispensatory, page 68. † Sydenham Pract. of Phys.

1. The vinegar of personal afflictions and sorrows.

2. The vinegar of the sufferings and sorrows of thy holy Redeemer.

Each of which hath its physical uses in perfectly restoring the soul to its pristine purity, and to fit her for enjoyments infinitely superior to those of which she was capable in the days of her primitive innocence.

1. There is the vinegar of personal afflictions, in which every morsel of comfort or soul provision must be dipped; because, whilst here, the plague of the heart still remaining, we are subject to disorders the most malignant. No situation of the air, however contagious, could generate disease in the human body, if there were not a fitness in its construction or habit to receive the infection; even so temptations, however violent, however subtile, could not infect the soul with the malignancy of sin, if there were not an aptitude in our hearts* to fall in with the designs of the powers of darkness. Whilst therefore there is in our mental habit an inclination to the disease of sin, we shall have need, by way of prevention, to dip our morsel in the vinegar; more especially, as the infection is already caught, and disease works in every member, as it did in Paul. This is the way in which our heavenly Physician effecteth our cure.

Who, that knows himself, does not see that the plague of sin in his heart has infected every faculty of his soul, and defiled every organ of the body, making it the instrument of unrighteousness unto sin? What hypocrisy, pride, and self-will dwell in the heart! How have the eyes and ears been open to vanity, and how frequently the lips have moved deceit! What hand has not perpetrated evil? and whose feet have not trod the paths of foolishness? Even in a converted

* *Aptitude in our hearts*, &c. This may be thought to militate against the purity of the creation state of Adam, and of the fallen angels: but when it is considered that there may be in intellectual beings, a principle capable of malignant impressions, without any the least bias to evil before that impression is made, the difficulty vanisheth. That such a principle did dwell in our first progenitor, the event has fully demonstrated: but to suppose that he was created, possessed of any inclination to moral evil, would be no less than blasphemy, and indeed an impeachment of the purity of the Creator himself. The tinder of itself would remain for ever without burning, but whenever it is touched by the smallest spark of fire, in virtue of that contact, is changed into the nature of fire itself; whereas the same spark, let fall upon earth or water, would languish and die away of itself. The first and second Adam are essentially different in the natural formation of their minds, as is apparent from the effects.—When Satan came to the first Adam, he found in him a principle capable of being influenced by temptation; which principle but for temptation might never have been discovered; but when he came to the second Adam, he found nothing in him of which he could avail himself. But the author is here speaking of man in his fallen condition.

state, how sad are the Christian's feelings! How does he sometimes feel inordinate affection and unlawful desire, glowing within him as a burning fever, to the drying up of his vital spirits! and is it not necessary, in such cases, that the fuel of his lusts should be cut off, and medicated vinegars be ministered for assuaging the burning desire? Happy had it been for Sampson if his fair and alluring Delilah had been cut off before she had betrayed him; then had he preserved the sight of his two eyes, the loss of which he lamented even in his death: then had he retained the youthful vigour of his brawny limbs unimpaired, and continued a terror to Israel's enemies. The very objects, the loss of which we mourn with the greatest bitterness, might perhaps, if continued ours, have proved as so many Delilahs unto our souls. In such a case then, the ministration of the vinegar along with our bread, must have been the result of the wisest counsel. It was more healthful to the soul of Sampson, and more instructive to the tribes of Israel, that he should grind in the prison house, than that he should loll effeminately on the lap of a strumpet. It was more to the honour of God; more consistent with the divine conduct in general, to punish Sampson by his own devices, and correct him by his own wickedness, than to leave him at large to walk at pleasure in the way of Sihor, and with impunity to drink the poisoned streams of a strange river.*

Behold how comfort and sorrow have been blended together, even from the beginning in the lot of God's people. You are by no means the first whose morsel has been dipped in the vinegar of personal tribulation and sorrow: no strange thing has befallen any of you in this respect; no, they are common to men: Abraham, on the gift of Isaac, must cast out his son Ishmael, which was very trying to a parent of his sensibility. Isaac and Rebekah were weary because of the rebellions of Esau, and because of his attachment to the daughters of Heth. All the blessings of a well ordered covenant did not make David forget his disorderly house. Solomon's wisdom was counterpoised by the vanity which he saw inscribed on every sublunary object. Paul's love to Jesus, and success in the ministry, could not prevent his groaning in his tabernacle, and crying out under the body of death; prevented not the smart of the thorn in the flesh,

* Jer. ii. 18, 19.

the messenger of Satan. The case is general, all, as well as you, dip their morsels in the vinegar.

That it ought to be so, is farther apparent from our proneness to thirst after the things of this world, sometimes with as much ardour as the unhappy patient in a burning fever thirsts for the cooling draught. The pleasures, the honours, and profits of this world, are very alluring, adapted to work upon our vitiated taste, and but too frequently carry away the heart from God and serious religion. It is profitable for us that God should take such measures with us, as to restrain our licentious inclinations, and make us happy, as it were, contrary to our inordinate desire. What parent, if he should see one of his children going to swallow a cup of poison, would not with eagerness snatch it from his hand? and does God do more by his people, than prevent them bringing ruin and destruction upon themselves and their purer comforts, by wresting from their hands that which would be fatal to them in the end. If a parent shall see a beloved child labouring under weakness, loss of appetite and the prevalence of disease, will he not by all means endeavour to exterminate the disorder, though he should find himself necessitated to make use of medicines, even the most unpalatable?

By the use of the vinegar of afflictions in the Christian life, great advantages are obtained in point both of knowledge and affection. Let experience speak, and it will tell you how much you learn of creature emptiness; how unsatisfactory to the immortal soul; how insignificant in comparison of that good of which you are in the pursuit. Disappointments, losses, and crosses in trade, are blessed means by which your Father prevents your taking up your rest in this world: bodily afflictions and darkness of soul give you such discoveries of your own absolute weakness and nothingness, as cannot without them be obtained. How are the hidden principles of iniquity dragged from their deep recesses in the heart, and brought forth to open view! how exceedingly sinful do our hearts by these means appear! how abject our attainments! how consummate our helplessness!

By these things the Christ of God becomes precious to you, and you cannot live a day, an hour without him. As you sink in your own esteem, Christ advances, he rises

upon you in worth and excellence: how adorable does his person become! how valuable his righteousness, because of your total privation of righteousness of your own! how inestimable his pardoning blood, because of your most aggravated guiltiness! By these means you learn to live upon Christ who is your life, and the life of every believer.

Dip then thy morsel in the vinegar of afflictions, for it is healthful and salutary; what is indeed necessary for thine enjoyment of any tolerable degree of spirituality: it must be done whether agreeable to thy will, or disagreeable; and it is best that it should be thine own act and deed; and better still, if it is done with cheerfulness. Jeremiah ate the dipped morsel, but it was by constraint, "It is a grief, and I must bear it." Micah did it voluntarily, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." But Paul glorified to do it cheerfully, "Much rather therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It is easy to see which of these makes the most graceful appearance; he that wrangled with his heavenly parent, and bore his will merely by constraint, or him that willingly endured, even gloried to endure, the whole of his pleasure. Impatience only tends to add to the burden; and rebellion of will, to procure a greater number of stripes. Dip thy morsel willingly in the vinegar, seeing it is for thy health, O believer, and at the same time the command of thine unerring Parent: dip thy morsel in the vinegar, for it must be done; if not voluntarily, thou shalt do it by constraint.

"Blessed is that man who endureth temptations" in a Christian temper of mind, without daring to quarrel with God, and saying to him, "What dost thou?" That was a holy resignation in good old Eli, to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." This was dipping the morsel willingly in the vinegar.

(2) There is the vinegar of Christ's sufferings in death also, in which our morsel must be dipped in order to our growth and healthfulness. In this present state of weakness and adversity we are subject to fainting, and as an antidote to it, we have need to dip our morsel in the vinegar of Christ's excruciating pains and dying agonies, that our morsel may be a restorative to us: this David evidently did,

when he tells us, that "he had fainted unless he had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

"Dip thy morsel in the vinegar; it will eat by much the more pleasant, and nourish thy faith, hope, and love exceedingly."

Dost thou eat the bread of comfort and pardoning love? Dip thy morsel in the vinegar of the expiatory sufferings of Jesus, as the only channel of pardoning loving-kindness, end the only means by which it is procured. No bread more pleasant than this to the soul; yet still it will be both more pleasant and nutritive, for its being dipped in this vinegar. How pleasant, how delightful is the voice of pardon, when I behold my bleeding Lord wrestling to obtain it! My healing is never so divinely ravishing, as when I feel the cruel stripes of the macerated Jesus. My bread can never eat with such a gust, as when I contemplate the penury of the Son of the Highest. How divinely fitting is the justifying robe when dipped in the ardent obedience of the sinner's substitute! Art thou accepted by infinite Holiness, O believer, and admitted to the table of the children of heaven? ask how it comes to pass that a rebel such as thou art is admitted to privileges so sacred and valuable? Then shalt thou be referred to the agonizing groans, and heart-breaking sighs of thine immaculate Redeemer. The heavenly glories themselves shall receive additional lustre from their procuring cause: let the songs of paradise revive upon thy memory, the mournful accents of thy plaintive surety. Let every comfort, that breathes heavenly delight on the heart of sinners, revive the dying Sabachthani of Jesus of Nazareth.

Is thy soul at liberty? think on the procuring cause of thine enlargement: see the penalty of thy transgressions; the dreadful curse of a broken covenant, lying in its utmost weight, on the only-begotten of the eternal Father. These things, if attended to, thy morsel thus dipped in the vinegar will make thy life more lively, and thy comforts more comfortable. Are the promises thy support, the daily food of thine immortal spirit? they all come to thee dipped in the wormwood and gall which thy Redeemer's soul shall for ever have in remembrance. A promise to the believer is nothing at all, unless it thus comes; for promises, as a reward of

obedience can yield no pleasant reflection to one who cannot obey perfectly in thought, word, and deed. But divine revelation shews the whole system of promises as yea, and amen, in the person of the adorable Immanuel. Let every comfort, every privilege, and every means of grace, refer you back to Calvary, the bloody mount of the Lord, where salvation is seen in its utmost extent and glory. How sovereign is grace; how free is salvation and divine favour? My soul, be it the subject of thine eternal contemplation; dwell upon it with incessant and ravishing delight.

God is not a barren wilderness to his people in respect even to temporal things; all have natural comforts in greater abundance than had the Son of God himself in the days of his humiliation. We having forfeited our title to every comfort, natural and divine, and he appearing as our substitute and common person, he had not a legal title to so much as earthly benefits, and therefore when upon earth he had nothing that he could call his own.* This was poverty indeed! the poverty due to law-breakers whom he represented: but poor as his circumstances were, through him law-breakers obtain many natural as well as spiritual enjoyments. Let then thy ever comfortable morsel be dipped in thy Redeemer's sorrow, and comfort itself shall be yet more comfortable.

Dip thy morsel in the vinegar, in all the kindnesses thou receivest at the hands of man; dip them in the unkindnesses which were cast upon him. Remember that in him there was nothing desirable apprehended, he was esteemed as one smitten of God and afflicted; was deemed an enemy to God, and to the common rights of mankind; was tempted, and to his face calumniated; was vilified, set at nought, spit upon and buffeted. When man caresses you, remember how your dear Redeemer was despised and rejected by men of the most reputable stations and talents. If thus dipped in thy Redeemer's sorrow, the caresses of men will never be injurious to thy soul's prosperity; whereas without such a qualifying acid, the favour of men might swell thee with pride, and draw thy affections away from thy God.

* This circumstance is a beautiful explanation of that of the apostle, 2 Cor. viii. 9. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." As the blessed Immanuel, all things are his, the earth with all its fulness, the cattle upon a thousand hills; but as the sinner's substitute, he stood in the place of his people, and was treated in all respects according to their demerit.

In all thy seasons of pleasure and joy, when pleasure sparkles in the eye, and joy dances in thy bosom, forget not that Jesus, thy holy One, Jesus, thine excellent Redeemer, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; from his cradle to his cross he was daily conversant with consummate grief. Indeed, how should it be otherwise, when such a load of guilt was laid upon him; a load such as would have sunk millions of worlds into utter destruction. When I hear my blessed Redeemer pathetically complaining that his soul, his holy soul, is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; that that immaculate Spirit, which never existed but in personal union with Almighty Deity,* was just ready to sink under the enormous weight of human guilt, it greatly tends to qualify my mirth, and reduce it to rules becoming the Christian. That Jesus wept, the sacred evangelist testifies; but that he laughed is no where said. Indeed he rejoiced in spirit, but with such a joy as was untinctured with even the appearance of the bursts of mad and foolish laughter. Dip every morsel of the bread of joy therefore in the vinegar of thy Redeemer's sorrow, so shall it be neither unbecoming, unseasonable, nor excessive.

When thou sittest down at thy well-furnished table, and partakest liberally of the bounties of providence; remember that thy Lord had no table of his own at which he could feed his followers, but fed at tables which claimed other masters: this thought will be an excellent preservative, and thy table shall not be thy snare whilst this one thought is inculcated. What moderation, temperance, and sobriety, yea, what bounty and liberality would this single thought give birth unto! let thy plenty incite thee to recollect his penury, and thy convenience bring his inconveniences to remembrance. When thy family is convened around thee in safety and peace, either to feed or worship, call to mind that dismal night on which all his disciples forsook him and fled; on which he trode the wine-press† of divine wrath alone, and of the people there were none with him. Thus

* *With Almighty Deity.* Although the human nature of the blessed Jesus exists in personal union only with the divine word, there is, there must be, a certain union between the said nature, and the Father, and Holy Spirit, in virtue of the unity of the divine Essence.

† *Trode the wine-press.* Treading of the wine-press by Jesus undoubtedly refers to the victory he gained over his enemies; but when could the heavenly Conqueror be more fitly represented, as dipping his garments in the blood of his enemies, than when he bruised the serpent's head, spoiled principalities and powers, and made an open shew of them, and that was when he fell under their seeming superiority.

dip thy morsel of domestic tranquillity in the vinegar of his personal disquiet; lying down in bed, safe and secure beneath the covert of divine protection, confident that God is thy shield of defence; forget not how Jesus, who had not where to lay his head, was want to wrestle in prayer whole nights for thy salvation. Instead of retiring as we do to rest, we find the loving Saviour retiring to a mountain to pray; to pray for us, being pure, perfect, and holy in himself; to pray earnestly, even in an agony, that he might obtain eternal redemption for all that should believe in him in every part of the habitable world.

Once more, are you fed with the bread of sorrow, and drink of the waters of affliction? by all means dip thy morsel then in the vinegar; plunge thy personal sorrows into those of the friend of sinners, and death shall remove from thy pot; even the bitterest waters shall become sweet and salutary; the seeming curse shall change into a sanctifying cross, and the apprehended indignation into fartherly chastisements. Bring all thy griefs unto Calvary, and hang them on the arms of that accursed tree where hung the great Immanuel, and however thick and threatening the cloud may be, thou shalt see everlasting love beam through its darkness; every present sorrow, the prolific source of future joy, and glory arising from every sigh and groan. Thou shalt see the once slain Redeemer faithfully collecting thy tears, thy groans, and sighs, and treasuring them up in heaven till thine arrival, that he may by them give an additional lustre to thy future glory.

DISCOURSE X.

And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.—Ruth ii. 14.

It having been attempted, in former discourses, to illustrate the name and character of this generous husbandman; also the damsel invited, in her character and former connexions; likewise to enlarge upon the invitation itself, we shall trace the agreeable and consistent conduct of Ruth on receiving such generous treatment; "she sat by the reapers—she ate what was given to her—she gleaned until even—she

beat out that she had gleaned—all that she had gleaned she carried home to her mother Naomi." These five things attended to, we shall have a more clear view of the exemplary conduct of this young Moabitess, and shall see how by small things the Lord is pleased to teach his people knowledge. As he is pleased by this damsel to instruct even the most grown and advanced among his people; so that, as Paul observes, he chooses things that are not, to confound those that are; and, as Jesus observes, perfects praise to himself out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, when the wise and prudent are left to perish in ignorance of the great salvation. The conduct of this amiable Moabitess was in all respects in character, agreeable to her needy, humiliating circumstances. For,

I. She is said to have sat by the reapers at meal time. She knew herself to be a stranger in a strange land, and having found a friend in the person of Boaz, she embraced his invitation with gratitude, and for safety convened with his labourers. It is good for *you* also, who know yourselves to be aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, to abide by the labourers of your Lord. If you would glean your living, you must follow the reapers: if you would eat your dipped morsel in safety, you must sit by the servants of Boaz. It is dangerous to depart into other fields, and sit in the company of strangers. What canst *thou* have to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or, what hast *thou* to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee, if thou followest after the ways of strangers.

Are you strangers and pilgrims, conscious of your urgent necessity? Let your necessity prompt you to cast yourselves upon the mercy of your heavenly Boaz; for he is the friend of the destitute, and the patron of helpless strangers. Embrace his invitation, come hither at meal time, and eat of the bread; who knows but he may reach unto thee the parched corn, and thou shalt be sufficed, and leave; at all events keep close to his reapers, and thou shalt see if at last he will finally cast thee out. Know, if a sinful Israelite could have such compassion on a friendless stranger, much more the friend of sinners, who laid down his life even

for his enemies: trust in his mercy, leave the issue to him, for it *shall be well.* If thou hast no hope, no Saviour besides him, thou hast his salvation in thy heart, as certainly, though not as fully, as if thou wast already in the region of felicity: he is the hope only of the hopeless; the Saviour, the all-sufficient Saviour, only of the necessitous.

She was needy, and pressed by want, gladly accepted of the invitation given her; notwithstanding she did not consider herself in any wise equal to the maidens of Boaz. Necessity alone makes the Gospel invitation suitable and welcome, removes from the mind all needless scrupulousness: before our necessity becomes absolutely urgent and indispensable, we are apt to frame many excuses, why we should not embrace it. We are too vile, too depraved and unworthy to venture upon privileges so great and distinguishing: we must stay yet a little longer, and remove from the leopard, at least some of his spots, clear the polluted heart from some of its filthiness, and in some measure abridge the power of sin before we can venture to make use of Gospel provision; because we are not like the saints of the Lord; our spots are different from their spots; and our character is far inferior to theirs: for under first awakenings, poor sinners are apt to consider the believer as a perfect character, and the church below as little inferior to *that* triumphant, however much the contrary appears in future experience. But when the hungry beggar appears at the gate of the rich man, when shall we see him refuse an alms because of his unworthiness, or make any mortifying comparisons between himself and the domestic servants within. We are not aware how much pride discovers itself in that impious modesty of ours, which makes us say with Peter, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man: Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet." Little considering that the more sinful we are, we have the more need of the Redeemer's approach unto us; or, that unless we submit to be washed by him, we have no part in his great salvation.

Necessity will make the sinner run to the Saviour's embrace; however secure the Israelite might have dwelt in time past, the moment he commences manslayer, and hears the avenger of blood at his heels, he flees with full speed to the city of refuge, nor dare he slacken his pace till safely

lodged within its environs. In like manner, whilst the sinner apprehends himself innocent, or at most no more guilty than others, he may rest very secure and easy; but when sin becomes exceeding sinful; when the clamours of a guilty conscience become loud and alarming; and the voice of condemnation sounds louder and louder, he will, he must flee to Jesus for relief: unworthiness and sin are no longer impediments in the way; but he casts himself at the wounded feet of Jesus, saying, "Though he should slay me, I will trust in him;" if I must perish it shall be here; it shall be crying out for mercy, for there is salvation in none other.

Ruth kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, and was not found in any other field; nor was her departure at all necessary, seeing handfuls were dropped on purpose for her, and none might reproach her for gathering of them. It is good for believers to glean only in the Gospel field, to abide fast by the virgin churches, for in wandering abroad there lacketh not danger. Curiosity, if gratified, may lead us into temptation and a snare, and into divers hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition. It had been well for Jacob's daughter had she confined her curiosity to the tents of her honoured parent, and his family, and not rambled abroad to see the daughters of the land, to the entire pollution of her person, and dishonour of her character. That is a good direction given by him who possesseth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, "If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents." What can be expected but peril and jeopardy, when we depart from God's appointed way? when itch lays hold of the ear, and curiosity presides in the heart, the erring feet are likely to tread the steps of danger, where soul comfort shall be blasted, and destruction come upon our pleasing sensations. It is good to watch against whatever tempts us to vacate our seats in church assemblies; whatever would induce us to forsake the assembling of ourselves together on the day of the Lord; set the example of the prudent Moabitess before you, and abide by the reapers of our heavenly Boaz.

II. She ate what was given to her; "he reached her parched corn, and she did eat." She ate corn—the corn

she ate was parched—this parched corn was reached to her—though reached to her by the hand of another, there was enough to suffice her, and still to be left for fresh comers.

At meal time she ate corn in the field of Boaz; not chaff or husks, as the sinners eat in a strange land; what she ate was healthful and nourishing, not debilitating, and apt to gender disease. Such is the food of the faithful soul, the corn of heaven drawn from the granaries of God; such only can feed the immortal mind, and nourish up the human soul to life eternal. Grace, sovereign grace, reigning through righteousness to eternal life, is corn proper to the flock of Jesus; but that doctrine which centers in self, and exalts the creature, is light and insipid chaff, which never did, which never can administer suitable nourishment. Where the great trumpet is blown, and a free salvation is published, thither resort, for that is parched corn provided for the hungry sinner, the friendless stranger: parched corn, a proper emblem of the believer's food, which hath all passed through the fire, before reached to us by our generous husbandman. The Redeemer's obedience includes the whole of the Christian's nourishment;* upon this he lives throughout his life; on this he lives in his dying moments; and only upon this shall he live within the regions of light and happiness. This is fitly represented by parched corn, as every part of it has passed through the fire, and that too heated to the utmost. It hath passed the fire of human malice, and hellish rage, as the evangelists abundantly witness: he was tempted of the devil, he endured contradiction from sinners against himself, and heard the malicious cry, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." It passed the fire of the burning mountain, which none with safety could touch; the fiery curse of a broken law, which would have pressed any other subject down infinitely lower than the grave; notwithstanding he rose superior to it, in virtue of his indwelling divinity. This holy obedience, the food of the Christian, passed through the fire of divine anger heated to the uttermost, as must clearly appear from that alarming summons given to the sword of justice by the indignant Father.

* *Nourishment.* The idea which the author has of the Redeemer's obedience, always includes his death and sufferings, as well as the rectitude of his conduct.

Zech. xiii. 7. "Awake, O sword! against my shepherd, and against the man, my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

Here the adorable Jesus is considered as the Shepherd of his people Israel, called and appointed to office by the eternal Father, and therefore owned for his own Shepherd; my Shepherd. But although the relation and appointment is owned; yet, considered as the sinner's substitute, no mercy is shewn him, but he is treated with the utmost legal severity: divine justice is roused; not the rod of a father, but the sword of a judge is employed against him: the rod is for chastisement, but the sword is for bloody execution, and it awoke in all its fury against the person of our holy substitute; so that our food is corn of heaven in the earth, and parched by sufferings the most intense.

This parched corn was reached unto her; "he reached her parched corn," before she could have an opportunity of eating: a fit emblem of the conduct of our heavenly Pastor, who hands forth the bread and the water of life to his humble followers. What we gather, he gives; our industry, however great, doth not in the least impair his bounty: he reacheth to us the corn of heaven, and we do eat. There are too ways in which the corn of heaven is reached to us; by the public ministry, and in private means; but both of these in the hand of the Holy Ghost, and the former as necessary as the latter; and the first of these is as much his gift as the last. It is by faith that we eat; but how can we believe without a preacher; and how shall they preach unless they be sent? Now we have heard, because he hath sent forth his preachers into all the earth, even to the ends of the world: hence it has reached Britain and her colonies; we who are by nature strangers of the Gentiles, eat more delicate food than that by which elect angels are sustained; because his Gospel hath not come to us in word only, but in power, in much assurance by the Holy Ghost; this is the way in which he reaches it home to our cases, and satisfies the hungry with good things. Indeed experience shews that not only the invitation, but the power to eat; not only the power to eat must come from him, but his hand must reach us every morsel of mental food and refreshment. She ate what was reached to her; unlike to Peter in his misjudged humility, saying,

"Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet: depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." She knew that she must either eat or starve, and deemed it better to live upon the bounty of a stranger than to perish by famine: just so will it be with every humbled sinner, who is hunted from all his subterfuges and lying refuges, he will be glad to cast himself entirely upon the goodness of the Saviour, and willingly be beholden to him for salvation: whereas, whilst unmortified to self and sin, you will have many excuses, all seemingly the fruit of humility, and therefore the more soothing to legal pride. For instance, the Saviour's holy person shall never be defiled by the sins of such a wretch as you are: you have too much esteem for him to murder him by your guilt and sin; you would not defile the precious fountain of his blood by washing in it such a polluted and filthy heart as yours: Lord, thou shalt never wash my heart; it is so vile it would defile thy heavenly hand but so much as to touch it. Thence it is that you cannot think of coming to Jesus, till you can do something worthy of his acceptance; or of washing in his cleansing fountain till you have at least purged away the grossest part of your filthiness: thus it is that legal pride assumes the garb of the deepest humility, and imposes itself even upon the dear people of God themselves. But in Ruth you have a very proper example set before you; she ate whatsoever was reached to her, asking no questions either for the sake of conscience or delicacy; go then sinner and do likewise.

Her food was reached to her with a bounteous and liberal hand, for though she ate till nature said it was enough, she left. "She ate, and was sufficed, and left." Many, long before our day, fed upon the corn of heaven; our fathers did eat bread in this wilderness till they were sufficed, and yet they left enough for their descendants, enough even for us: we also may eat freely and plenteously; for in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare; therefore, when we have eaten till we are sufficed, there will still be enough for all comers. Though but an handful of corn is cast into the earth, and that too upon the tops of the mountains, so exceedingly fruitful is it that it shall shake like Lebanon, and scatter fruit sufficient to feed all nations, peoples, kindreds, tongues, and languages. Every thing in Christ is plenteous and abundant: with

him is plenteous redemption, abundant pardon, and more than conquest: with him are riches of every good; riches of grace, of mercy, and glory; all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Therefore there can be no straitness with Christ: all contractedness is in our own bowels, and not in the fulness of the Lord of glory. We have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss, upon some selfish consideration: if we ask, we must expect what we ask, not in the least on account of any thing in our asking, or of any personal qualification whatever, but merely in a way of independent, sovereign grace. When you and I are filled with his fulness, and quite absorbed in his personal glories, there will be just as much for new comers as there was for us, an inexhaustible fulness still to be entered upon. You see that the natural sun every day irradiates innumerable objects, without decreasing its own effulgence: much more the Son of righteousness, the spring of whose light and life is entirely in himself, and not in another; when all the redeemed hosts shall have lived infinite ages upon his fulness, we shall then find that his stores are undiminished.

III. She gleaned until even, notwithstanding she was so plenteously regaled at noon; the plenty with which she was fed had not the least tendency to hinder her diligence: she ate, she was sufficed, and left; yet she arose and gleaned diligently. As the pious Herbert says, "Much would have more." The adage is true with respect to the things of this life, as the greatest increase in no way tends to abate the thirst of getting. So in divine things, feeding increaseth hunger, drinking serves to inflame our thirst, and feeding plenteously makes us more industrious in gleaning, as is shewn by the history of this Moabitess.

The bounty of Boaz prompted her industry, and plenteous feeding invigorated her for gleaning. If any of you are favoured to-day with a liberal repast, it will not in the least abate either your necessity or diligence; your wants will return in their season, and therefore though you eat now, you must yet glean in future. What Boaz gave to Ruth, she gathered; handfuls were scattered; but, as observed in another place, the scattered handfuls must be gathered before she could use them for food. The blessings of grace also are scattered abroad in the Gospel field in the greatest abundance; but they must all be gathered in a diligent use

of the appointed means. Sovereign grace could, if infinite Wisdom saw meet, save its objects without the Intervention of means; and so might Boaz have given Ruth the handfuls unscattered, but he did not choose to do that, neither does grace choose to do this. God has therefore bound his people to as strict, as conscientious a use of the means, as if upon them only salvation was entirely dependant. And although he hath reserved to himself a sovereign and undeniable right to work by, without, above, or even contrary to them, when he sees meet, we may not expect any blessing without the most diligent attendance upon the ordinary means. What he gives in a way of sovereign goodness, must be gathered in the way of the strictest diligence.

Handfuls of corn were scattered on purpose for her, but scattered nowhere except in the field of Boaz, therefore she found her account in abiding fast by his household maidens. In other places, and under other ministrations, your ears may be tickled, and your fancy delighted, by the pleasing sallies of wit, and lively displays of genius and imagination; but under a pure Gospel ministry alone, may you hope to enjoy the plenteous blessings of new covenant grace. Pleasing the ear with that which has little or no tendency to affect the heart; to tickle the fancy, and flatter the imagination, without informing the judgment and enlightening the understanding, will answer no valuable purpose. Were preachers inflamed with all the oratorical powers of Demosthenes or Cicero, unless Jesus Christ, and him crucified, be their theme, they are not likely at all to profit the Lord's people.

This accounts for it why people, even of good parts and taste, are contented to sit under the plain preaching of that Gospel, which cautiously avoids the enticing words which man's wisdom teacheth, notwithstanding that thereby they risk their reputation for judgment and taste: not barely contented with the simplicity of the Gospel, but holding in comparison of it, all philosophy, by whomsoever taught, to be vain and contemptible; contemptible as the insignificant dross; contemptible as the basest dung. The believer strays not abroad after strangers without suffering loss; he finds his account in abiding fast by the maidens of Boaz, and gleaning in the field of the blessed Gospel.

When believers have gleaned till the evening, they never find that they have store laid up for futurity; in this therefore there is a palpable difference between them, and the self-sufficient Pharisees: the latter may sing a requiem to their own souls on account of the goods which they have laid up for many years; but the former set out in emptiness, experience emptiness all their days, and even finish their course in total emptiness. So, from day to day, from his first outsetting in religion to his dying moments, the believer never has store laid up, but lives upon Christ for every hour's supply: nor do I know a better or more lasting evidence of grace, than such a consciousness of nothingness as glorifies Jesus as our all in all. How groundless then are the fears of many who mourn their situation, and at the same time bear about them the best evidences of the Christian life! evidences that they would deem solid and substantial if found in another; but which they pass over unnoticed as found in themselves. I come now to a

IV. Particular in the conduct of Ruth, which also demands our serious attention. She not only gleaned till evening, but "she beat out that she had gleaned" before she carried any part of it home to her mother-in-law. Corn, even the finest kidney of the wheat, grows encompassed with chaff, and therefore must be beaten out and winnowed before it is fit for use. Hence in ancient times the threshing instrument having teeth was in use, and in ages more modern the flail and fan. To explain what the meanest peasant must necessarily be acquainted with, might well be deemed superfluous. I shall therefore proceed immediately to the application; and would observe, that the word is preached by us ministers, so that the infinitely wise God can and doth make it the power of God to salvation. The true word is indeed preached, and perhaps the whole counsel of God is from time to time delivered to you; but,—but it is mixed with much of our own chaff: I speak not this in disparagement of any minister; I hope I can say with Moses, "Would to God all the Lord's people were prophets;" and I think I can even add to it, "Would to God all the Lord's people were *successful* prophets." But I speak of others as I feel in myself, and he that knows my heart will witness, that I feel

much ignorance, pride, and hypocrisy in my ministrations.

Paul, that incomparable preacher, freely confessed that he saw and prophesied but in part: if he in part, surely we in a very little part; consequently, much of our own chaff is mixed with our Redeemer's wheat; and that you our hearers are called to beat out what you glean, by a diligent search of the Scriptures, by meditation and prayer.

They are noble and ornamental hearers, likely to grow and profit by what they hear, who receive no doctrine upon the preacher's testimony, but diligently search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so. This was the practice of the Bereans, and for this their character is ennobled by the Holy Ghost; and extolled by his amanuensis. Searching the Scriptures is indeed indispensably necessary, in order to distinguish the voice of Jesus from that of antichrist, and avoiding the paths of heresy and error, as well as to profit by what we hear. This searching of the Scriptures, and comparing of spiritual things with spiritual, will divide between the chaff and wheat, and will lead to that meditation that will digest the word you have heard, and render it food for the immortal mind. Amongst beasts, under the legal dispensation, only those were chosen as clean which parted the hoof and chewed the cud; an animal action which figures that contemplation upon the word we have heard, that will make it useful and nutritive. When we hear a sermon with ever so much attention, and think no more of it afterwards, there is but little prospect of its being of much use to us, in animating our frame, and making sin still to be more detestable.

Touching prayer, it has been observed, that it is always seasonable, and in many cases indispensably necessary; necessary prior to our hearing the word, that we may hear with attention, and mingle faith with our hearing; after sermon, that we may profit by what we have heard; that the word preached be not to us like the seed sowed among thorns, or stones, which cannot grow to maturity; so that he who would reap advantage by the word preached, must pray over it with earnestness.

The word is preached in a mystery, which mere unassisted reason can neither understand nor receive. God manifested in the flesh, is such a mystery of godliness,

that will require the instructions of the heavenly Prophet himself, in order to subdue our enmity against whatsoever transcends the unassisted efforts of natural wisdom to comprehend, and to make us willing to embrace God, and the Father, and Christ, as revealed in the Gospel of mysterious grace. How necessary then is prayer, meditation, and searching the Scriptures, to our feeding upon the divine testimony! For want of these, many are almost famishing amidst the greatest plenty; crying, My leanness, my leanness; whilst the corn of heaven lies in handfuls around all our camp. How diligent will people be about the things of life! Things that are comparatively of no consideration, can administer no pleasure in the prospect of dying; and ought not we who have an eternity in view, an ever-during existence to hope for, much more to be diligent in the use of all appointed means to obtain the enjoyment of God and Christ, whilst we are training up for the kingdom of peace and felicity.

Once more: there is yet a

V. Part of the conduct of Ruth which deserves the believer's imitation, and which I would a little touch upon before I dismiss the subject. We have already heard that she embraced the generous invitation, and came hither at meal-time—that she sat by the reapers—that she ate the parched corn which was reached to her, till she was sufficed, and left—that she rose up after feeding, and gleaned till evening—that she laboriously beat out what she had gleaned—and now we have to observe,

That having beaten out and cleansed her corn, she carried it all home to her mother Naomi; yea, even when Boaz loaded her with as much as she could carry, as we find in the subsequent part of the story, it all went to the mother: an example, how rarely followed, though so truly worthy of imitation! This intercourse and communion which this young Moabitess kept with her mother-in-law, is capable of improvement very profitable to believers as members of Gospel churches.

God bestows gifts and graces upon each of you according to your measure, but not entirely upon your own personal account; the leading and public design of the whole is the building up of the saints, and edifying the body of Christ. It is a mean, ignoble, antichristian spirit, that leads a pro-

fessor to live only to himself; yet many such professors there are, from whom you hear nothing either of their troubles or comforts; they have no share in the internal communion of the church; they bear no part of the common burden farther than assisting in outward things; their hearts have no share, no feeling in the burdens of their brethren. These unsocial spirits walk alone in the midst of company, and live selfish lives even under a Gospel profession: but it ought to be considered that the Gospel spirit is a social spirit; mutual good is the great end of Christian society, and that the more extensive a man's privileges and gifts, the more he is called to usefulness in the church of God.

The church is our mother, whom we are called to serve and comfort; therefore every comfort you glean ought to be brought home to her; so disposed of and applied, that she may share in your pleasure. It is unknown what delight it would afford an assembled church, to hear how the Lord had visited and spoken kindly to any of its members; it would be upon the whole as a token for good that the Almighty had neither forsaken nor forgotten them. Every degree of fresh information you receive from the unerring Prophet in the knowledge of himself; every ray of divine light by which the treasures of Scripture knowledge are opened to your understanding, bring directly the first opportunity to your venerable parent for her edification; for the whole community are edified by knowledge imparted to individuals.

The day of the Lord is in a particular manner appointed for a gleaning season; whatever is your success on that day, ought to be imparted to the church in her retired and mixed assemblies. If the Man is pleased to look kindly upon thee, permit thee to gather even among the sheaves, and cause handfuls to be dropped on purpose for thee; if he invite thee to the bottles, and reach thee food at meal-time, inform thy mother of it all, it will rejoice her heart, and open her lips in praise and thankfulness on thy account, and she shall share in all thy delights, whilst thus she breathes her fervent gratitude, "Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee; blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead!" If it should so happen that the Man come not into his field

that day, or that thou shouldst not see him, or hear any thing from him; or if he should chide thy unguardedness in venturing into any other field, for not keeping fast by his maidens; or take offence at thy sinful modesty, in not gathering the handfuls dropped on purpose for thee; tell it to the church, tell her every tittle of what passeth between him and thee. Ruth told her mother all that the man said unto her without any reserve. Happy would it be for the church of God, could we with freedom communicate to her all that the Man says unto us whether good or bad. O what love, what delight would glow in every bosom; and how near should we approach to the state of the blessed!

Give your good old mother the church, a taste of the food with which your beloved Bridegroom is pleased to entertain you at meal-times; so shall you have her prayers for the continuance of his bounty to you, and for wisdom to enable you diligently to attend his field, and go forth with his virgin train. Ruth ate, was sufficed, and left; what she left she brought home to Naomi, and she also shared by this means in the bounty of Boaz.

One thing in the account must by no means be omitted. When Ruth came home from gleaning, Naomi inquired where and with whom she had spent the day; and thus the favour of her love, and the meanness of her circumstances, did not at all lessen her parental authority. No circumstances, how dark and distressing soever, can deprive a Gospel church of the authority of inquiring into the conduct of its members, where, how, and with whom they glean; nor can any thing excuse a church from this as their immediate duty. It is injurious to members to be left at liberty to glean where their fancy may lead them, whether in the field of Boaz or in another field.

Ruth's answer is truly becoming; she sustains the subordinate character of a daughter to admiration. The mother says, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day, and where wroughtest thou?" Some saucy, self-conceited young woman would have replied, "What is that to thee? Sure I am of age to judge for myself, and am wise enough to know what field is most profitable to me." But Ruth, with becoming submission replies, "The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz." When truth and integrity direct our steps, there is no need of the least evasion; we may

give a minute account of our conduct. That a Gospel church hath authority to inquire into the conduct of all its members, is a truth that cannot be denied; yet there are members who will murmur and complain if a church exerts its authority, and with a sullen air, ill becoming a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus, will dare to reply, "Sure a church is no prison: have not I a right to go where I will, so that I neglect not the worship of God?" This unbecoming treatment of a church discovers the greatest ignorance of the principles upon which society is founded.

The end of all society, civil or religious, is that we should be helpful to one another; but if after I am become a member of society, I should consider myself as having a right to break through its fundamental laws with impunity, it would shew that I have neither inclination to, nor knowledge of, its leading design. Such treatment of a church evidently discovers an impious neglect of that solemn engagement we entered into with the church, when at first we commenced its members. Then we covenanted before God and man to give ourselves up to one another in the Lord, to strengthen each other's hands, and to walk together in all the ordinances of the Redeemer, as far as enabled, without blame. I have indeed remarked, that for these twenty years past, in which I have been conversant with Christian people, that I have never heard church authority spoken lightly of, but by those whose consciences laboured under a struggle betwixt guilt and pride: guilt, from a consciousness that their conduct could not bear the strict examination of a Gospel church; and pride, which prompted them to seek by every evasive means to conceal their infamy.

But when I speak of church authority, I am by no means to be understood as intending the authority of the minister; who, in my opinion, can do nothing but as he acts by the power of the church, as their delegate; and has no more power in church government than any other of its members. A ruler and a preacher are two different characters; and a man may have every quality requisite unto the first, and be very inadequate to the last. As to the ministry of the word, no man is to be his dictator; but, as a member and ruler, he is entirely the church's servant, under their direction, and to them accountable, as much as

the most private of all their members: if the minister himself is accountable to the church, what must be its authority when acting simply by a divine warrant over the rest of its members?

Now, to dismiss this text, permit me to ask you, my dear hearers, with what weight these things lie upon your mind? Whether you really see your necessity of living upon the bounty of Jesus for life and salvation? Know this of a truth, that all who are afar from him shall perish, for the words of eternal life and salvation are only in his possession. Needy sinners, do you consider that the man Jesus is our near kinsman, to whom the right of redemption belongs, and who will not fail to take care of you and yours? Put then your cause into his hand, and so shall you prosper; and drink of the well-spring of life and consolation. Let all see with what spirit the ordinances are attended; whether you come to them as those that need assistance, and really seek the blessings of grace; if you do, you will be sure to find, for that is his promise, to which you shall do well to take heed.

DISCOURSE XI.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi.—Ruth, iv. 9.

HAVING briefly treated of the daughters of Naomi, and consequently their different dispositions and conduct, the retrograde motion of Orpah, and Ruth's firm attachment to her mother-in-law; having noted her humility, obedience, and industry, in assiduously gleaning throughout the day in the field of Boaz, we shall now treat of her enlargement, and reward in that dignified station to which she was raised, and the renown conferred upon her by the people of Israel, as one of the honoured mothers of the transcendently illustrious Redeemer. This honour, this reward, consisted in her being owned as near of kin to Boaz, and as such united to him in the bonds of marriage, according to the institutions of the Israelitish legislator: concerning which connexion some things are to be considered as preliminary be-

fore we can come at the union itself; as, on Naomi's part; on the part of Ruth; and on the part of Boaz.

I. On Naomi's part some things are to be considered as preliminary to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

1. The good woman's heart was set upon seeking rest; a comfortable and honourable settlement for her daughter Ruth, who had voluntarily become partaker with her in her afflictions; that she might have no reason to say, that the God of Israel was to her as a barren wilderness, after she had forsaken her kindred and native gods for the love she bore to a mother in Israel. "Shall I not seek rest for thee, my daughter, that it may be well with thee?"

How solicitous was the mother church of the Jews for the poor Gentiles then uncalled, Cant. viii. 8, 9. "We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts; what shall we do for our sister in the day she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver—if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." Prophetic of that purity of doctrine by which the New Testament church is sustained, and that profitable and pleasing code of discipline by which it is governed and defended: likewise descriptive of the spring from whence we derive these blessings so eminent, and privileges so exalted; as derived from the Jews from whom all salvation flows. Jesus himself, that foundation and corner of the beauteous fabric, was a Jew in lineage, and subject to the Jewish law of circumcision, notwithstanding the law of ordinances was abolished by his mysterious death. The master builders who laid the foundations of this palace of silver; those skilful artists who inclosed the door of the gospel church with boards of cedar, were all of them Jews, members of that mother church, which so early interested herself in behalf of her younger, her minor sister, whom she foresaw, by the spirit of prophecy, would be spoken for in the time appointed.

In one thing, indeed, the analogy will not hold: it was the decline of life with good Naomi when she thus sought rest for Ruth her daughter: but the Jewish church was in the beauty, glory, and vigour of her youth, when she cared for the Gentiles. "I am a wall," saith she, "and my breasts like towers." It was when vision was in its brightest splendour, when the word of God was plentiful and abundant. And such were the tender sentiments of the spiritual among

the Jews at that time, however thick and gloomy the cloud of ignorance, error, and enmity became in after times amongst them.

Naomi's carefulness of her daughter's welfare, is farther analogous to the tender sentiments and solicitous conduct of a Gospel church toward those damsels, those virgin souls, who have forsaken all for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, and who have as yet no visible settlement, no visible inheritance in Israel. Jerusalem is always tender towards her daughters, the spouse is solicitous for the happiness of her companions, and the church in this case will use Naomi's words, and say, "Shall I not seek rest for thee, my daughter, that it may be well with thee?" Shall I not bow my knee to the Father of mercies, and make earnest supplication for thee before our common Goel, our near kinsman? Shall I not point out before thee the good footsteps of the ancient flock, that thou mayest apprehend the good, old, and perfect way?

2. She revealed unto Ruth the nearness of relation subsisting between herself and Boaz. Little did Ruth know, when the good man treated her with so much unexpected kindness, that he was her near kinsman, and that she had a legal claim of marriage upon so honourable and excellent a man. How distant from her mind, on receiving the parched corn at his hand, the thought of the nearest alliance which possibly can take place, commencing between her venerable host, and a poor, helpless, desolate Moabitish damsel, and less still, if possible, that a race of kings should spring from this alliance; and least of all, that from her womb should proceed the great Messiah, the Saviour of the world. But Naomi tells her, "the man is near of kin to us;" and no doubt had instructed her in the Mosaic law, in reference to the obligation upon the near kinsman to raise up seed to the deceased, prior to her approaching unto Boaz in the thrashing-floor.

The Gospel church, in virtue of the ministry of the word in her assemblies, reveals to seeking souls—to strangers come to glean in their Redeemer's field, his affinity by blood to the children of men; especially those who are divorced from a legal hope. Mahlon's widow may always assure herself that Boaz is her near kinsman: the sinner who is dead to the law, who can no longer hope to live upon his

own *well doing*, may assure himself also that Jesus is his Goel, his friend and brother, born on purpose for the adversity of the soul.

But O! little does the poor, trembling, self-condemned, and hopeless sinner know, that he has a personal claim upon Jesus as the near kinsman of the perishing. That a guilty convict may warrantably plead consanguinity with the Holy One of Israel; that a dying thief may solicit a seat in the Redeemer's throne. Even when informed doctrinally of this affinity, how difficult it is to give credit to a truth so mysterious, and yet so indispensably necessary! How strongly unbelief will remonstrate against an appropriation of this blessed truth, none can say, besides the man who has endured the personal conflict. But unbelief is the offspring and the parent of error, and publishes nothing but the counsel of the enemy: such is every thing that tends to discourage the helpless and needy from trusting in the Redeemer's perfect and finished salvation. If any sinner ever had room to question the efficacy of the grace of Jesus, surely the thief on the cross was the man: yet he questioned it not, but preferred his petition to the dying Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus remembered him whilst yet on the cross, and that same day introduced him to the assemblies of paradise, as a trophy of his victory and conquest upon earth.

3. Naomi directs her daughter to seek out his retreat, and to come privately to his feet (ver. 4), make confession of the identity of her person, prefer her supplication to him, and even to put him in mind of his duty to her as the near kinsman, under whose shadow she was come to trust. Such instructions are likewise exhibited by the church to her followers and attached friends, as yet unprovided for with comfort in Israel. Seek him in private, when no eye but that of Heaven is upon thee; come secretly to his feet, and lay thy helpless, desolate state open before his seat of mercy: freely confess the baseness of thine original; he will not despise thee on account of the hole of the pit from whence thou wast digged. Acknowledge thy former marriage to the legal covenant, but be sure to inform him of the death of thy hope and comfort in thy first husband. Tell him that Mahlon is dead, and that thou art seeking an inheritance in Israel: tell him plainly thou art Ruth,

the Moabitess; that thou hast left thy kindred and thy country gods; that thou hast no pleasure in those things of which thou art now ashamed: that if he should reject thee, thou shalt be miserable in both worlds; that thou hast now no possession in the land of Moab, and must be destitute for ever if thou findest not favour in Israel.

Make supplication to him: say to him, "I pray thee spread thy skirt over me;" for I am naked and exposed to the inclemency of the weather. See that wretched infant, Ezek. xvi. how helpless, how hopeless its state! But he passeth by, not with the unconcern of the priest, or of the Levite, but with bowels of compassion, like the good Samaritan: his eyes are fixed on its wretchedness; they sparkle with love, and drop with sympathy; he stands fixed, and can proceed no farther: his holy hand stretches forth the crimsoned mantle, and covers all its pollutions. This is Jesus, thy friend; Jesus, thy dear Redeemer, thine adorable kinsman: let thy prayer be preferred to him, he will not forsake the poor and needy: plead thy relation to him, for he is the seed of the woman, and the Son of Man: tell him that thou art bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Art not thou he who was born of a daughter of Adam? who lived and died in the room of such sinners as me? who, with thy dying breath, didst pray for thy murderers, and for me amongst the rest of the bloody train?—Have mercy upon my apparent nakedness, and spread forth thy robe of righteousness over me—regard my pollutions with a pitying eye, and wash me in thy cleansing fountain—suffer a poor, helpless, desolate sinner to be beholden to thy beneficence for life, pardon, and salvation. Such words are doctrinally put into the mouths of young converts by the church, careful for their present and eternal welfare.

4. Naomi encourages Ruth patiently to wait the issue of the enterprise, assuring her, that it would finally prove to her advantage, chap. iii. 18. "Sit still, my daughter, until thou knowest how the matter will fall: for the man will not rest until he have finished the thing this day." Probably Ruth might be restless and uneasy about the event; might even deem it scarcely possible that it should terminate so happily as her mother-in-law had encouraged her to hope. But Naomi, better acquainted with the laws of Israel, and with the integrity, rectitude, and benevolence

of her kinsman, assures both herself and daughter, that he would take care to act the part of a kinsman to them, and that he would not rest till the thing was accomplished.

Young converts are apt to be jealous of the Redeemer's love, and exceedingly to fear that he will never condescend to such misery as theirs: especially if permitted to wait for some length of time under the ministry of the word, without receiving sensible comfort; how prone are they to fear that comfort is not designed for them; and, in a word, that it is not to such as them that he will shew the plenitude of his mercy. But the church, better acquainted with the way of the Lord, assures them, that those who ask, shall receive; who seek, shall find; and that of all that come to him he will in no wise cast out. That although Infinite Wisdom may not seem meet to answer as soon as we call, invariable truth hath assured us that the needy shall not always be forsaken, nor the expectation of the poor perish for ever. And therefore, although the vision may seem to tarry, in a manner very discouraging to their view, the spouse encourages her companions to wait for it; assuring them, that in the end it shall speak, and not lie; shall speak good words, and comfortable words unto their souls; as Jesus cannot see a poor sinner perish at the footstool of his throne, whilst it is in the power of his arm to help him out of his misery.

II. The conduct of Ruth herself, prior to her exaltation, may not be unworthy of our present notice, as it naturally tends to the end proposed.

1. She considered herself as a poor ignorant Moabitess, unacquainted with the laws of Israel; therefore, she resolves implicitly to obey her mother in all things. "All that thou sayest to me, I will do." It is remarkable what simplicity attends the young convert on his first setting out in quest of a kingdom; how low his opinion of his own, how high his esteem of the wisdom of the church! He also is ready to say, "All that thou sayest to me, I will do." He expects scarcely any thing short of perfection, in doctrine and discipline, in the spirit and conduct of the church, till sad experience teaches him from his own feelings, that this militant state is at best a state of imperfection; and that Christ's own sanctified ones are apt to halt both in doctrine and discipline.

2. She risked her personal reputation in order to obtain a settlement in the Lord's inheritance; and has been censured for her conduct by many of those who love to cavil at Scriptural characters, and at Scripture itself. But even those pretenders to reason and delicacy ought to consider, that the simplicity of those ancient times admitted of things in common life, which would in these times of rampant lust, be indelicate and dangerous; that human nature was then universally depraved, and in enmity against God, will not be denied; nevertheless, it cannot be proved that lawless love, and wanton lust, were arrived at the state in which they appear in modern times.

Besides, it is plain that Boaz, the party most intimately concerned in the affair, was far from considering her conduct so much as indiscreet, much less bordering upon indelicacy; yea, that he considered the step she had taken as virtuous and praiseworthy, chap. iii. 10. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end, than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich." Ver. 11. "And now, my daughter, fear not, I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the people of my city do know that thou art a virtuous woman." After such a testimony of Ruth's virtue from this venerable Hebrew, the party most nearly concerned, one would suppose that *little critics*, at the distance of three thousand years, would blush to censure this amiable Moabitess.

In this, however, she is not alone; for who ever yet sought a settlement in Israel, a kingdom of glory and felicity, but at the expense of their reputation. That Jewish Rabbi could not put in a word in favour of Jesus and his religion, but he is instantly branded with coming out of Galilee. Saul was in great esteem whilst he was mad with rage against the church, but as soon as brought to the feet of Jesus, and become a preacher of salvation, he is held to be a seditious person, a disturber of the people, a man who turned the world upside down. The moment your soul is laid low at the feet of Jesus, and your cry is for free mercy, you commence fanatics and enthusiasts in the esteem of the wise and prudent, from whom the mysteries of the kingdom are concealed: agreeable to this, our blessed Lord tells his hearers, that "if any man will be his disciple, he

must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow him." Yea, he denounceth a curse upon those who are spoken well of by all men, and beloved by the world. So that if you would win Christ, you must be content to part with your reputation for sense and prudence, and be willing to be a fool in the eyes of the intelligent worldling.

3. When Ruth lay at the feet of Boaz, she declared who and what she was, "I am Ruth, thine handmaid," a woman made drunk with affliction, desolation, and sorrow. So freely does the poor sinner make confession at the feet of the Saviour. I am Ruth, the poor Moabitish damsel, drawn away by the good report I have heard of thy land and country: I am a guilty descendant of apostate Adam; one who justly merits thy wrath and indignation, yet look up unto the seat of mercy: one who may justly be sent down to hell to take up my abode with devils and damned spirits, but would fain obtain an inheritance with thy sanctified ones: one who has destroyed myself by transgression, yet looks up unto thee, for help and pardon: Lord be merciful to me a sinner. Like unto Ruth, you will make supplication to Jesus, whilst you lie in suspense at his feet, saying, I pray thee, spread thy wing over thy handmaid, and cast not out a poor helpless sinner, who is come to trust in thy shadow: cover me with the robe of righteousness, and clothe me with the garments of salvation.

As farther directed by Naomi, she pleads his kindred, "thou art a near kinsman;" and so may the sinner plead with Jesus, and use his relation as an argument to win his regard: for Jesus is thy Goel, thy kinsman, O sensible sinner! and thou mayest as warrantably aspire to the blessings of his grace, and complete salvation, as she might aspire to this honourable relation. She had the word to warrant her conduct; thou hast the same. Thy Jesus will take thy trusting in his salvation as much a kindness as Boaz took the conduct of Ruth, and he will do all that thou requirest of him. Allow me to say, that in seeking after the blessed Jesus, and desiring to be found in him, thou art aspiring to the greatest honour which God can confer upon a mortal worm; and by so doing thou pleasest and honourest him; for he is glorified by giving, rather than by receiving.

4. Ruth renounced all other society for the sake of

Boaz, even before she knew that he would act the part of a kinsman towards her; and in this she shadows forth the poor, convinced, sensible sinner. At all events he is necessitated to forsake the vain pleasures and uncertain honours of this transitory world; "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life;" the sins to which he has been addicted, and company with which he has been connected. Should he even be miserable in the future world, he can no longer live in the sinful practices and changing customs of this; and whatever becomes of him hereafter, he will choose religion now, even upon its own account. The things in which he formerly delighted, are become his shame and burden; every past pleasure is become the parent of present pain: the company from whom he could not refrain, are now quite disgusting to him: all of which are to others, if not to himself, so many convincing evidences, that the Spirit of God has begun the work of sanctification with power in the soul; and are to the church a manifest insurance of the enlargement of the captive from his prison and fetters.

5. Once more: Ruth told Naomi all that the man said to her, she withheld nothing form her; if good, that she might rejoice with her, and, if otherwise, that she might sympathize with her in her distresses. How open and free are many young converts in communicating their experience! They are apt to tell all that the adorable Man Christ Jesus saith unto them; till having unhappily cast their pearls before swine, they see the pearls trampled under foot, and feel themselves rent, they become as reserved as ever they were free: and being deceived by some under a profession, they suspect the whole, and will have no manner of confidence in any. But, as observed in a former discourse, it were well if every daughter of the church could find freedom to tell her mother all that the Man says unto her, whether in a way of reproof or consolation. And happy were it for individuals if such were the general temper of the church, that this might be done with safety to our own peace. Having thus considered the spirit and conduct of mother and daughter, I shall,

III. Attend to the conduct of Boaz, prior to his union with the fair Moabitess, and see how far it may tend to lead us to contemplate the ways of Jesus towards his people.

1. He acted the part of a prudent and vigilant husbandman, who overlooked his rural affairs in his own person, and left not the winnowing of his grain solely to his servants. He went into the thrashing-floor, and attended to the winnowing of his barley himself.* "I also," saith Jesus, "went down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valley; to see whether the vine flourished, the pomegranate budded."† Yes, the heavenly Husbandman is at the head of his own affairs, and suffereth none of his servants, how skilful soever, to act but by his direction. He comes into his church, his thrashing-floor, to inspect the labours of his servants, and to examine thoroughly the grain to be laid up in his granary. When any pretended servant of his shall take upon him to act independently of Jesus, or, which is the same thing, to act without his authority, he becomes antichrist, and so far an enemy to the Redeemer's power, as sole proprietor of the thrashing-floor.

Whenever the Redeemer, our exalted Lord, condescends to come into his thrashing-floor, it is usually to winnow his wheat from the chaff. It was so at his coming in the flesh, according to that of his forerunner the Baptist,‡ "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner: but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." In what an astonishing manner did the conduct and doctrine of Jesus divide between man and man, separate the self-sufficient, and the helpless sinner; between the proud Pharisees, and harlots and publicans. The parable of the Pharisee and publican will be held in everlasting remembrance by the church of God; and blessed shall they be who shall enjoy the publican's portion, and come down justified from the divine tribunal.

When Christ came in the Spirit, and preached his Gospel by the mouths of his apostolic legates, it was still the same; still produced the same separation. To hear one part of a multitude crying out, on one hand, under extreme anguish of soul, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" and on the other hand, another part of the same multitude raging

* Chap. iii. 2. † Cant. vi. 11. ‡ Matt. iii 11, 12.

against the preachers, as men drunken with new wine, morning drunkards, which are the worst of all, must need give us a very affecting view of the winnowing and dividing quality of the preached Gospel: yet this influence, so amply manifested at the feast of Pentecost, has invariably attended the preaching of the Gospel from that time down to the present; and in what age soever, or wheresoever the Gospel has been preached, it has proved a savour of death to the self-sufficient, and foolishness to the wise in the world, as well as the savour of life, and the power of God to the salvation of all who believe. Blessed are they, and only they, who are not offended with the person, grace, and righteousness of Jesus.

When Christ comes into the soul, in a convincing and converting way, it is still the same; his business is to winnow. By the breath of his fan to disturb the chaff, and draw forth our latent corruptions to view; to put our hope to the trial, and manifest its foundation to be but sand: to discover the emptiness and insufficiency of all creature dependance and delights, and bring the soul to an entire submission to the righteousness of God. How stripping this season! when all heart goodness, integrity of intention, sincere endeavours to please, strong resolutions to amend, and supposed capacity to will and do, flies before the word, in the hand of the Spirit of God, as chaff before the wind of the fan. Nothing is left but a mass of sin and wretchedness. The self-sufficient, the man of virtue, and self-esteem, must excuse me if I plan my doctrine here according to my own experience; and let him believe, that if he has not sustained these winnowings of Gospel truth, they have been familiar to me; and I have most certainly as good a right to proclaim my own wretchedness, as any man in the world can have to talk of his own personal excellence. But from my very heart, I pity those who are strangers to these winnowing influences of the Gospel, which I consider, upon good ground, as essential to final salvation. But to return to the history of Boaz, it is recorded of him.

2. That he took up his lodging for the night by the heap of corn; which, without any force put upon this transaction, may lead as naturally enough to contemplate the presence of Christ with his people. If ever you would see Jesus; if you would obtain any favour at his merciful hand,

you had best look for him by the heap of wheat; seek him in the thrashing-floor amongst the assemblies of his people. His presence is promised in a peculiar manner to his assembled church. "Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them to bless them," are the words of the true and faithful Witness. Here are no stipulated conditions; but the promise is absolute, and the grace is certain. As sure as you meet together in the name of Christ, so sure is he present with you to bless you, either in one sense or other: only then examine well into the motives of your meeting, whether you indeed meet in the name of Christ; if you do, there is no more reason to doubt his spiritual presence with you, than there is to doubt his corporeal presence being now in heaven.

It was with his eye upon this truth, that the apostle thus cautions the believing Hebrews in his epistle to them;* "to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some was." And why this care to keep up a conscientious assembling of yourselves together, if there was not some peculiar privilege connected with it? And what privilege can there be abstracted from the presence of Jesus with his assembled people? It is vain and absurd; it is even fanatical, to hope for the comforts of his love but in his own appointed ways. To meet conscientiously, to meet constantly with his assembled church, is his appointed way, and where, therefore, ye may warrantably expect his presence, and hope for the blessings of his redemption.

3. She lay at his feet, she waited till midnight, dark midnight, before he spoke to her: this is frequently the case with those who seek to Jesus for life; he puts their faith, hope, and patience to the fullest trial, before he is pleased to manifest his loving-kindness, the more effectually to bring them off from every sandy foundation, and to endear his own person, blood, and righteousness more to the heart. When the Syrophœnician woman came crying after him in behalf of her daughter, he answered her "not a word:" on her persisting in her suit, he was requested by his disciples to send her away, because *truly* she was troublesome to them. He answered her with a seeming repulse, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs:"

* Chap. x. 25.

and after all, having put her to the trial before all the people, he highly commends her faith, and treats her with uncommon regard.

The blackest cloud was drawn over Joseph's fortune just before his advancement to government. The hand of oppression was most severely felt by the Israelites just at the eve of their deliverance from bondage. So it is most commonly midnight darkness with the soul, when we are favoured with an interview with Jesus, either at our first enlargement from bondage to the law, or subsequent manifestations. It was at midnight God visited Jacob at Bethel; at midnight he condescended to be wrestled with by the same patriarch at Peniel. In the night of darkness, light shines forth; on the mount of straits, deliverance is revealed. When brought to his feet, Boaz

4. Makes Ruth explain herself. Who art thou? what dost thou want with me? I am Ruth; Ruth the produce of incestuous contact; Ruth an helpless Moabitess. What dost thou want? speak plain, and shew me thy request. I want that thou shouldst act the part of a kinsman towards me: spread, I pray the, thy skirt over me, for I am come to seek a settlement in the Lord's inheritance; for the sake of which I have left my father's house, and the idols of my native land. Jesus also brings his people to an explanation of their base original and native connexions; of their personal misconduct, and heart alienation from God; of what they deem most valuable for time and eternity; and what for this purpose they require of him: for he will be inquired of. Although all blessings are laid up in him, he will have his blessings sought for by earnest prayer and supplication. Good reason indeed that we should lie low at those blessed feet, for they once were pierced for our salvation. And, O sinner! with what freedom mayest thou open thy case to the friend and confidant of perishing sinners; for he is an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. O, my soul! make Jesus thy confident, so shalt thou have a friend in the time of need, like Ruth the Moabitish damsel. Go to him alone as she did, and according to his own direction, so shalt thou prosper in the suit preferred. For,

5. Having brought her to an explanation, Boaz dealt honourably with her, and spake to her only the words of

kindness and compassion. Far from blaming her confidence, or rashly censuring the step she had taken, in thus exciting him to his duty, he highly applauds her for the honour she had done him.* "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter, thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether rich or poor; and now, my daughter, fear not, I will do to thee all that thou requirest." From which it is plain, that Boaz took it as kindness that she should glean in his field, rather than that of another man's. But a greater kindness still, that she should take this method of putting him upon obeying the institutes of his God. Jesus is also far from upbraiding the soul that comes to him for life and salvation: he never once upbraided the dying thief with his former villany, nor penitent Magdalene with her former ways, however unclean; but of all who come to him, he by no means casteth out. The dying villain, no sooner solicits his remembrance, than he obtains this gracious promise, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The only instances which look any thing like upbraiding of the sinner by the Redeemer, are those of the woman of Samaria and Paul. To the first he said, "Thou hast well said I have no husband, for thou hast had five husbands; but he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." But does he not immediately reveal himself to her, and send her into the city to preach his Gospel? To Paul he said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and also reveals himself to him immediately; sends him forth to preach that Gospel which he had hitherto persecuted.

6. Boaz gives her encouragement to wait in expectation of what he would do for her. "And now, my daughter, fear not, I will do to thee all that thou requirest." This is also an emblem of the conduct of Jesus towards his people. It is not always, perhaps very seldom, that he is pleased to manifest himself to them on their first application to him; but usually he gives some staying, encouraging, supporting word, before he makes himself fully known to his people, as their own Jesus, their all-sufficient Redeemer. There is a set time to favour sensibly, and Jesus must do all things decently and in order. According to the customs of Israel, must regulate the dispensations of his

* Chap. iii. 10.

grace by the purposes of Infinite Wisdom, and take his Moabites honourably to his bosom. But, O seeking soul! he will go about it, he will not be at rest till he has finished thy deliverance; and in the meanwhile thou shalt live upon his benefits, and his bounties shall sustain thee.

Thus I have cleared the way to the intended marriage, by considering its antecedents, or preliminaries as they lie with the mother, the daughter, and with Boaz, and shall make the marriage itself, God willing, the subject of another discourse.

DISCOURSE XII.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. —Ruth iv. 9, 10.

The second head of discourse on this subject at first proposed, was to speak of the purchase made by Boaz, and of his marriage to Ruth the Moabitess. Under which general head we shall consider, I. The manner. II. The matter of the purchase which he made; and III. The rites of the marriage itself. Each of which we may accommodate to Gospel purposes, and, if duly attended to, may serve to display the excellent loving-kindness of our gracious redeeming Kinsman.

I. The manner in which the purchase of Ruth and her inheritance was effected, falls, according to our plan, first under our consideration. And we find it,

1. To have been openly transacted in the gate of the city before the elders of the people. The upright intentions of this honourable Israelite had no need of private and clandestine means for their accomplishment; the law of his God being his rule, his conduct was able to bear the most public scrutiny. Those actions are to be suspected which require the aid of darkness and privacy; as none besides evil deeds need to shun the searching light. Al-

though convinced of his near alliance with this daughter of Moab, of his own duty as a kinsman, and now, by her endearing conduct drawn to affect her tenderly, he would avoid whatever might seem to be but an appearance of any ground of reproach upon either of the parties concerned; and therefore transacted the whole in the public gate of the city.

When Jesus, our excellent, our most holy Redeemer, was about to redeem his church out of the hands of her enemies, about to purchase to himself an everlasting possession, and bring home the daughter of the Gentiles, the younger sister to his dwelling, he does all things in the broad face of the open day, before men and angels; in such an open and public manner, as to render heaven, earth, and hell, the witnesses of his unparalleled transactions. Without the gate of his city he paid down the price of our redemption, whilst the sun that enlightens our horizon beheld with horror the amazing deed, and the rifting rocks proclaimed, *We are witnesses.* Men and angels; angels celestial, and angels infernal, witnessed the dying agonies of our expiring Kinsman. When he weds the soul to himself in the day of calling grace, it is the same; it is by the public ministry of the word, in the hand of his Spirit, that he brings her to his feet, to solicit redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of her sins; and when he speaks kind and affectionate words to the heart, the very countenance will tell all that he hath said unto you; he even brings to an open separation from the customs and company of the world, and adherence to his people and ordinances in a way of profession.

When he espoused the Gentile church to himself, it was as it were by the sound of a trumpet, so very open and public, that the voice of his heralds, "went into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world;" so that all heard, and had notice of the gracious design. And it shall still be so, when at the last day, he "shall come the second time without sin, to the salvation of his people." He shall openly acknowledge them for his own; in the face of heaven, earth, and hell, shall espouse them to himself for ever in faithfulness and loving-kindness. Whilst hell trembles with horror, burns with indignation, and rages with malice, heaven shall resound with acclamations

of praise over the Bridegroom and his beloved bride; and he, more tender of his love than the turtle of her young, shall rejoice over her with eternal delight; shall rejoice to feed her for ever out of his own personal fulness of grace and glory. Thus, believers, whatever debasing thoughts of yourselves ye may indulge, your infinitely amiable Lord is not ashamed of his attachment to you, is not ashamed to call you brethren, to call himself the Bridegroom of your souls. O bless the Lord, ye souls of his people! let heart and hand be devoted to him whilst existence endures!

2. In the redemption of Ruth and her inheritance, every thing must be transacted with decency and order; therefore as there was a kinsman nearer than Boaz, who consequently had the prior right of redemption, it was necessary that every thing should be settled with him before he could proceed in the work intended.

It was so with respect to the church; there was a kinsman who had a right prior to that of Christ. According to the order of things in the economy of revelation, the law was our first lord and wedded husband. The law, in its covenant form, is that way of life to which the soul naturally adheres, and upon which it founds every expectation of future good; nor can it ever be won over to the way of grace, till all hope of being justified by works is slain. Then, and not before, the soul will be brought to the feet of Jesus, saying, "Spread, I pray thee, thy skirt over me, for thou art a near kinsman." But Jesus must have the consent of the law, in order to which he must consult its honour, fulfil its tenor, and endure its penalty. God, in the character of a lawgiver, being as tenacious of his honour as in that of the God of mercy. And surely this honourable Israelite, in whom there is no guile; this adorable Kinsman, designed the righteousness of his people, will do that which is right, and will therefore never wish to indulge the mercy and benevolence of his own compassionate heart, at the expense of the honour and veracity of the law, even in its covenant form. Before, therefore, the heavenly Bridegroom could take his betrothed bride home to his house, he was under a necessity of settling every thing to the entire satisfaction of the law, that he might obtain its permission to take his Moabitess to himself to be his wife.

"Boaz went up to the gate, and sat him down there; and,

behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's, and I thought to advertise thee, saying, buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, tell me, that I may know; for there is none to redeem it besides thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, what day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must also buy it of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance."

The nearer kinsman probably having children of his own, deemed an accession to his family by another wife, of dangerous consequence by confounding his seed, and injurious to his present children; therefore refused to act that part by Ruth, for which, as the nearer kinsman, he was qualified, and delivered up his pretentions as such to Boaz.

The law, in its covenant form, had the prior right and claim upon mankind, but could not redeem the alienated possession. It is said to be weak through the flesh in this respect: and whatever becomes of the ruined race, no delinquent may hope for redemption, or even favour from that covenant: it has an inheritance of its own, which must not be marred on any account: its holiness, truth, and justice are inviolable, and consistent with which it can shew favour to no criminal whatever. Redeem the inheritance who may, the law will have its own inheritance unmarred; have its honour maintained inviolable, as holy, just, and good: have the purity of the precept, and the equity of its penalty, maintained beyond controversy. Indeed, when it is considered that the law is none other than a transcript of the infinite Mind, as soon may Jehovah part from his perfections, and cease to be the just and holy One, as the law give up any of its prerogatives. Therefore not to redeem, but to condemn the guilty is its province. Yet being duly honoured by a perfect obedience, either in person or by substitute, it demands no more; it allows the sinner to

escape under the shadow of its representative, and delivers up its future authority into the hand of Jesus. "Redeem thou my right."

The right delivered up to Boaz, the other claimant must have his *shoe pulled* off in token of lost authority, and to shew that thenceforth he had no just right so much as to set his foot on the inheritance in question. In like manner, the *law* being magnified, honoured, and satisfied, it delivers up all its authority into the hand of Jesus, disclaiming all right whatever so much as to approach the purchased possession in its covenant capacity; and renouncing all claim upon those who lie at his feet as the near kinsman. How great, O believer, is this privilege to them who have no might or power to perform duty, to be delivered from that covenant which can be satisfied with nothing short of perfect obedience! which denounceth death for the smallest defect! but thy deliverance is complete and eternal. The law otherwise than in the hand of Jesus, has now no more to do with thee, than if it had never been given, or if thou hadst never offended against the purity of its precept.

When the first claimant, or nearest kinsman, refused to marry the widow and to raise up seed to his brother, it was appointed that she should pluck off his shoe in token of disgrace, and spit in his face, as finally renouncing all connexion with him; from which time he was called in Israel, him that hath his *shoe pulled off*.

It is with all reverence I speak of a point so delicate, when I have to do with a law which is holy, just, and good; yet there is something not unlike to this takes place, when the soul is first driven from the legal to the Gospel hope. He hath long lain at the bottom of mount Sinai, looking up to the burning throne, imploring patience to be exercised with him, and time to turn his hand, promising finally to make good his payment, and satisfy its strict demands. But still it is to no purpose; the law is inexorable; it knows not how to shew mercy. Meeting with nothing but bitter reproaches, heavy accusations, and tremendous curses from that quarter, hope sickens, and at last perisheth, from the moral impossibility apprehended of doing any thing acceptable and pure in its sight. But when Jesus speaks words of kindness to the soul; when he makes the fulness of his grace, and plenary satisfaction known, with what ala-

crity does the soul reject its authority, and appeals to the Redeemer totally and finally, renouncing all allegiance to it as a condition of acceptance with God, and of our enjoyment of eternal life. This is a delicate proposition, and I beg to be heard attentively on it. I mean not a renouncing of the law in any sense, which can give countenance to libertinism; for the very man who, to take up his rest in Jesus, renounceth the moral law, as a covenant of life, on obedience to which depends his everlasting all; I say, this very man most heartily approves of, and most cordially embraceth it, as the best and the only rule of conversation ever exhibited, considered in the hand of a mediator. Indeed, the profane use which has been made of this truth, and the extreme to which some men of evil minds have carried this renunciation of the law, to the encouragement of all manner of licentiousness, has intimidated others from that candid disquisition which the importance of the subject requires; so difficult is it to escape one extreme when we labour to avoid another.

The middle way is most commonly the path of judgment, and in this case it brings the greatest honour to the law, as the most perfect rule of obedience that ever was, or ever will be exhibited to either angels or men; whilst it rejects its covenant form as inadequate to every purpose of grace, and design of everlasting love. But this is as different from the doctrine of modern ranters and Antinomians, as light is from darkness; this is the very doctrine delivered by St. Paul (Rom. vii.), and for which he himself was deemed an enemy to holiness and good works, notwithstanding he maintained the justice, goodness, and holiness of the law as a rule of conversation: and thus the fruit of good works is raised up to the honour of the law, notwithstanding it is dead to us, and we to it, as a covenant of works.

We shall now pass from the mode or manner of the purchase, to the things purchased, which was designed as the

II. Head of discourse, and to which we shall now attend.

The description here given of it is very comprehensive, "All that was Elimelech's, all that was Chilion's, and all that was Mahlon's."

1 "All that was Elimelech's." His sole property descending to Naomi and Ruth, upon his demise, and that of

his two sons, upon Orpah's rejection of the inheritance of Israel, and all that descended from him to them, was now the matter of the present purchase.

Elimelech, as I told in a former discourse, signifies, "My God the King;" therefore to accommodate the history to Gospel purposes, the doctrine will be, "Jesus, our near Kinsman, redeemed and purchased all that belonged to our God the King." Redemption by Christ supposeth the state of its objects to be that of slavery; therefore can have no reference to sinless angels, because they were never enslaved: and as it is confined to those who in a special and peculiar manner belonged to Elimelech, it will fix the bounds of redemption to the chosen of his love, and the preserved of his grace. Jesus addressing his heavenly Father in the behalf of his people, thus says: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." His by his own sovereign and free choice of them in his Son, to be the adopted of his grace. Having thus chosen them in, he also preserved them in Christ when fallen in Adam, and with him exposed to wrath and ruin.

All the chosen being the property of God, all the chosen were given to Jesus for redemption when fallen; and actually redeemed in the day of saving power: not one left unnoticed, unransomed, and unprovided for, but all that was Elimelech's were purchased for the Redeemer's own inheritance: not one besides, for the business of kinsman here, was only with what particuliarly belonged to the Father. What their number is, or what proportion they bear to those that shall be left, is no part of my concern: nor what reasons induced the Almighty Father to choose some, and to leave others; it is enough for me to see it one of the fundamental truths of revelation, and I rest satisfied that God, who worketh all things after the council of his own will, can well justify himself to his creature: moreover, that the same justice which might have left the whole, when become sinners, cannot be impeached for having left some unprovided for by that salvation which is the object of their natural aversion. The business of Boaz on this occasion was not what should become of the possessions of other men, but to redeem and secure the property of Elimelech to the family. Neither was it the business of Jesus in this world to inquire what should become of the children of the

devil, but redeem his Father's property, and everlastingly secure their inheritance unto them; so that all who were chosen in him, should finally enjoy the pleasures and immunities of paradise.

2. The matter of the purchase under consideration was all that belonged to Chilion the son of Elimelech. Chilion, signifies *perfect*, and how remote soever he himself might be from being any figure of the blessed Jesus, the name in this sense of it is very applicable to the person of the Son of God, who is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; whose ways are all integrity, and whose words are inviolable truth; which makes the spouse to say of him, "his mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely." Chilion's property here referred to, is perfectly answearable to the state of the elect, considered in union with the adorable Immanuel. Perfect, spotless, and pure must the members be, because such was their head in whom they were chosen. Christ and his church, in the original choice, were not considered in that situation into which the latter fell in Adam, but in all the resplendency of that glory and the brightness of that perfection, in which they shall appear in the paternal kingdom. This need not seem strange when it is considered, that being in Adam as their old covenant head, they were considered just what he had made himself; in like manner what the Son of God himself was, such were, and such are they who are considered in him. All then who were chosen in Christ from everlasting, were considered as perfect, all fair, and without spot in him: all thus perfect in him were the matter of his purchase.

Chilion also signifies *wasted*, and is truly descriptive of the awakened sinner.* He was once alive without the law, but the commandment coming in the day of divine power, slays his legal hope, and revives sin in all its defilement and malignity. He feels himself wasted, ruined, and undone; stript of his primitive integrity and innocence; stript of moral capacity to do the will of God, and yet without strength to abide the penal consequences of his disobedience: wasted with respect to the goodness of his heart,

* I am so far from thinking it an impropriety to apply the name Chilion to Christ, and his members, that there appears to me a real beauty in it, seeing the same word is at once expressive of the perfection of the Head, and the personal ruin of the members.

and rectitude of conduct; his beauty withers as the fallen leaf, and his glory fades as the flower that is cut down. His former foundations of hope are razed, and every refuge of lies cast into a general ruin; the whole world is to him as a waste, howling wilderness, in which he can have no pleasure, and is yet destitute of hope in another. Yet a sense of being thus wasted by reason of sin, is a sure and infallible evidence of your being the Redeemer's purchase. All that was Chilion's; all that are sensibly wasted and brought, with the dying thief, to supplicate his favour, who alone can be a refuge to the dying sinner, and such every saint shall find himself when he comes to give up the ghost. Though you should live as saints, my dear friends, you must lay your account for dying as sinners; and, if I do not exceedingly mistake, you will find as much need of Jesus, and fresh communications from his fulness in your dying moments, as ever you did in your lives, or may do at this present moment; and whatever yours may be, I am sure that my necessity is great.

There is yet another sense in which the word is used by some, which is, *like a dove.* How far the Holy Ghost might intend this history as adumbrative of the blessed Gospel, I have more than once told you that I pretend not to say; but surely there is something here which is truly analogous to that blessed scheme. Here we first view the elect as standing perfect in Christ from eternity, even when fallen in Adam; in their fallen state as ruined and wasted by sin, and as recovered by grace. In a fallen state, the souls of even the elect lie in the ruins of humanity, as among the pots of Egypt, of sin, and affliction. But by calling grace, the soul is made as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and whose feathers are yellow gold.

The fruits of the Spirit are truly ornamental, and produce this effect wherever they are wrought. They are wrought in every converted soul; for he is become the subject not only of the Spirit, but of faith, hope, and charity, &c. as his blessed fruits and graces. Hence, when we read of the King's daughter, we hear of her being all glorious *within,* as well as being clothed in wrought gold: or of the church, we shall find her clothed with the garments of salvation, as well as covered with the robe of righteousness. Holiness ever becometh the house of the Lord; and uprightness of

heart those who stand in the courts of our God; so the fruits of the Spirit will ever adorn the subjects of grace; and faith, hope, and charity shall abide in the heirs of heaven and happiness.

3. Boaz, on that day, purchased all that was Mahlon's. This was the husband of Ruth, and his name signifies *infirmity:* exactly agreeable to the heirs of grace, purchased by our heavenly Kinsman. They feel their infirmity, and groan under an afflicting sense of it, till set at liberty by the Spirit of Jesus: they are like him whose hand was withered; they cannot work out their own salvation; the sick of the palsy, who could not walk; no more can they in the ways of righteousness and true holiness: they are like the man born blind, and cannot see, therefore their daily cry is, "Lord, that I might receive my sight;" and, like the deaf adder, they cannot hear to edification. In a word, they are the very people described in the parable, as *poor* and *maimed, halt* and *blind;* so that they cannot do the good that they would.

How helpless is the state of the convinced sinner! How wretched and miserable the condemned criminal, when the horrible sentence is denounced upon him! Such is the state of that sinner in whose heart the sentence of death is passed, till the word of salvation present him with a full and free pardon: yet such in his infirmity, that could pardon and salvation be obtained by performing any, the slightest condition, he must die in despair of ever fulfilling the terms, incapable of a truly good thought of himself. Possessed of an evil heart of unbelief, a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, yet cannot of himself control it in the least, nor wash away the smallest of its stains; the poor believer in seasons of darkness and distance is apt to conclude that his case is singular, and his spots different from those of God's children: yet this discovery of pollution, this sense of incapacity either to will or do, only proves you to be the Redeemer's purchase; for he purchased all that was Mahlon's, all the sons and daughters of infirmity.

Mahlon also signifies a *song*, which may lead us to reflect on the believer's character. For, although they have their days of mourning and nights of anguish here below, they have also their short seasons of singing. On the back of

some sore temptation, or some deep affliction, when God appears to them, and says unto the heart, "Behold me," how is the heart filled with gladness and the lips with praise! Israel, although in a waste, howling wilderness, could sing, when God had brought them through the deep, and delivered them from the hosts of Egypt. There are seasons, how short, and how seldom soever, in which the believer says, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, because he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and covered me with the robe of righteousness." And eternity is coming, in which they shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb for ever and ever; so that the purchase of our holy Redeemer may be called the sons of music, or the children of Mahlon, or a song.

From these remarks, you may see who are the people purchased by Christ for his own possession and inheritance. —All who were chosen in him by the Father from everlasting—all who stood perfect in him when fallen and ruined in Adam—all who feel their sore, and seek unto him for help; who know themselves to be ruined and wasted by sin, and apply to him as the repairer of the breach—all whose state is hopeless and helpless, and desire to be saved by Christ alone—such, only such, are they who may hope to have a new song put into their mouths, even salvation to our God and to his Christ.

Thus much for the mode and matter of the purchase; which we shall understand as now accomplished, and proceed,

III. To the marriage itself, and the several rites used in its celebration, which we shall also find to be significant and instructive.

As to the marriage itself, it was public and before witnesses, which indeed is essential to that institution; for there is no such thing as a marriage private and without witnesses. People living in fornication may, to quiet their own consciences, soothe themselves with a notion that their private engagements are equivalent to marriage, but in reality it is no such thing: an union of heart and affections, as necessary to a happy marriage state, is readily granted; but that it is any part of the essence of marriage, must be denied. Domestic and social happiness being the ends proposed in this institution, care has been taken to

have its celebration public before witnesses, the better to ascertain the end proposed.

It has been observed, that the purchase which Jesus made of his people was public and open; and it may now be observed, that his marriage with his church does not take place in a corner. The banns are proclaimed by the sound of the great trumpet, which sound has reached to the remotest bounds of the habitable world. The creation has been invited to come and see the bride; and the consummation of the nuptials shall be before assembled worlds. O God, may I on that day be numbered among the righteous! Then shall it be a day of festivity with me, and this poor, sin-oppressed soul, shall then rejoice in God my Saviour.

Touching the rites of the marriage, it may be observed that

1. The bridegroom took a cake of bread, and brake it, or a small parcel of corn, and divided it betwixt the bride and himself, to which it is thought Hosea alludes, chap. iii. 2, where he tells us, "that he married his wife for an homer and half of barley." This rite among the Jews was truly significant, as pointing out the oneness of their union, that by marriage they became one, even as the cake was before it was broken. Believers, as married to Jesus, are said to be one bread, probably in allusion to the bread used in the Lord's supper. No union can be more near than that of Christ and his mystical body; the head and members are bone of each other's bone, and flesh of each other's flesh.

Moreover, a oneness of interest is here shadowed forth; such a oneness as no circumstance can alter, being immutably fixed in the laws of necessity. There is a moral impossibility of a man and wife having two separate interests: to admit a possibility here, would charge defect upon the relation which constitutes the parties one flesh, and no longer twain.

This unity of interest most beautifully agrees with that endearing relation betwixt Christ and his church, with whom his interests are common. Nothing can be to the Redeemer's glory but what tends to the advantage of his church; and nothing can be to the advantage of the church, or of individuals, but what has the glory of Christ as its ultimate object.

The breaking of the cake, signified the dependance of

the bride upon the bridegroom for food and raiment, and every supply. Consistent with this in all civilized countries, especially those called Christian, the eye of the wife is to her husband for supply; a law from which only barbarous nations and barbarous people have departed. This most loudly preaches the Gospel to us, and points out our constant, eternal dependance upon the fulness of our heavenly Husband.

Yes, believer, you are indebted to Jesus for all, for every part of your supply. Whatever gifts, whatever graces ye are the subjects of, they are all derived from his personal fulness. Your clothing is his; your robe of state is your husband's property; you live upon him daily; daily derive from him mercy to pardon, and grace to help in every time of need. This is agreeable to the eternal purposes and transactions of grace, which have laid up all fulness in him; to the injunctions of Holy Writ, which direct us to be strong in, and live upon the grace of Christ. This dependance of the church of Jesus the Bridegroom, effectually secures all the glory of salvation to grace alone; lays the foundation in grace; in grace raises the beautiful structure, and brings forth the head stone with shouts to grace.

This dependance is warranted even in the meanest be-believer, by the same rite of breaking bread in the marriage; and when broken, sharing it between the parties married; for by this he endowed her with his property: the same union which rendered her dependant on her husband, gave her a legal title to his possessions and property. With holy reverence, and the warmest gratitude, let it be said that the Heir of all things, the adorable and faithful Bridegroom of his church, hath been pleased to endow her with all his property, notwithstanding her uncomely appearance and base original. Yes, my friends, he hath endowed you with all that he has; his holy obedience, all-sufficient atonement, heavenly Spirit, and unsearchable riches. Is he the Son of God, and only-begotton of the Father? ye also are the sons of God through him; for ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Is he the Heir of all things? ye also are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. All the grace that is in him; all the glory he is heir unto, and even his death, and life, are

all the believer's property, in virtue of union with him, as his spouse, glory, and fulness. I know not but his breaking bread between himself and his disciples, in the first institution of the supper, might have an allusion to this rite used in Jewish marriages; thereby leading the believing church to consider him and themselves as one bread, one mystical person, having eternally one common, indivisible interest, and reciprocal possessors of one common property.

(2.) Another rite, which, according to Mr. Weemes, was called *Tebhignoth kedushim*, was the bridegroom's putting a ring upon the fourth finger of her hand, saying, "Be thou my wife, according to the law of Moses," was very significant; expressive of the perpetuity of the relation commenced, and probably designed to lead the church of God to contemplate a union more answerable to the figure. A ring with the ancient Magi was an hieroglyphic of eternity, being one continued line without an end or beginning. In every thing, as far as it could be done, God hath graciously accommodated his way to human customs and the received doctrines of men, the better to penetrate the mind with things that are heavenly and spiritual.

It is beyond a doubt, that one great end of natural marriage was to shadow forth the relation between Christ and his church; and may not that rite of the ring, that hieroglyphic of eternity, be improved in such a way as may lead us to contemplate the eternal relation between Christ and his church. That it was designed for some spiritual improvement, I think is pretty clear from the parable, where the returning prodigal is said to have had a *ring* put upon his hand, as well as otherwise ornamented, seeing it is universally agreed that the application of that parable is spiritual.

Some people, indeed, affect to deny the eternity of this union betwixt Christ and his church, alleging that it commenceth at conversion, or when the soul by grace closes with Christ as the only desirable way of salvation; they will even be ready to treat the doctrine of eternal union as Antinomianism, as if it produced some evil effect upon the morals of men. If these gentlemen mean no more by union, that the unity of our hearts and affections to Christ, I readily grant that this takes place in conversion, and not before.

But if they mean that an elect soul is never considered by the eternal Father as in Christ till he actually believes, I must reject their doctrine as absurd and preposterous. They themselves talk of the elect as chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of being preserved in him from the beginning; of his being set up from everlasting as their federal head and representative: as if they could be chosen in him, without being considered as any way united to him; or that the Son of God could be a head without any manner of relation to that body of which he is the head.

One of the characteristics of truth, is to be consistent with itself; this therefore cannot be a truth, because of its inconsistency.

But it is consistent enough to believe, that although our hearts and affections are never united to Christ till effectual calling, the persons of all the elect were united with his person in the act of choosing or election, by which they become God's property, in a manner different from the rest of creation. In the settlements of grace, all was laid up in Christ, not for himself, but for them; which shews that grace still considered them as in relation with him, as members with the Head. In a word, as the spring of this union is in the Deity himself; it must follow, that it is eternal as himself, and that what takes place in regeneration and conversion, is only the effect of that union secretly subsisting from everlasting. But as my business is not now to defend this truth, so much as to hold forth from the history that which may be profitable to the souls of God's people, I pass on to a

(3.) Ceremony used in Jewish marriages, which was their putting a crown first upon the head of the bridegroom, and then on the head of the bride: which ceremony seems to have been performed by the bridegroom's mother, if alive, Cant. iii. 11. "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."

I thought to have finished the ceremonies of the marriage in this discourse, but time being so far elapsed, must beg your attention for another on the next opportunity.

DISCOURSE XIII.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. —Ruth iv. 9, 10.

We have been discoursing of the rites of the Jewish marriages, the

(3.) Of which was the coronation of the married couple; not indeed with crowns of gold, but of laurel, or bays, or flowers, very common on ancient solemnities, and used even in modern times on jovial festivals, especially as an ornament to the queen of the May. The sacred penman of the Canticles seems to allude to that ancient custom, Cant. iii. 11. "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him, in the day of his espousals, in the day of the gladness of his heart."

Much has been the pains taken by commentators to adjust the sense of this text, and a very practical improvement of it has been given by Dr. Gill, in his excellent exposition of that mysterious book; but I must say, that I cannot help thinking that the sense of the text has been but slightly touched upon.

To me it appears that the mother here spoken of, mystically understood, is the Jewish church, of whom the Saviour descended. The Jewish church may be said to have put the crown upon the head of Jesus in a two-fold way: by type, and by prophecy.

1st. Every type figured forth, and centered all in him, from the destined bullock, down to the flour sprinkled on the altar.* More especially,

2d. By prophecy, perfectly describing his person, character, and work; ascribing all salvation to him, and shew-

* Lev. ii. 2.

ing the confluence of the redeemed Gentiles to his standard; fully describing the glory of Christ and his church in the Gospel day of gracious visitation.

The day of his espousals may intend either his bringing of the Gentiles to the knowledge of himself, or the glorious day of salvation, when the whole church shall be gathered into one, and join him in the kingdom of glory. The latter of which I should prefer to that of the day of his crucifixion, which does not appear to me to be so properly called the day of the gladness of his heart. The crown of salvation thus prophetically put on the head of the Redeemer, it follows,

That the crown of glory is first put upon the head of the Bridegroom, as of old; but as sure as the crown is put upon the head of Jesus, it shall also be put upon the head of the bride: for as the head and members were loved by the Father with the same love, they shall, according to the tenor of the Redeemer's prayer, be crowned with the same life and glory. The interval between the coronation of the one and the other may to us seem long, but that of the former ensures this of the latter. Christ died not for himself, but for his people, as their covenant representative; and in the same character he has entered into the heavenly world, the sure pledge of their certain arrival, and his coronation the earnest of theirs. O sirs! when we hear these things, how diligent should we be to know for ourselves the real ground of our hope, whether it is founded upon Christ and grace; whether his assumption of our nature is the spring of our consolation; or we have some other hope distinct from him. Be this your care, for diligence here is sure to meet with its proper reward; and this only is worthy of our studious attention. How vast the glory to which the believing church is predestinated! to sit on the same throne, and to bask in the same glories with the Son of the Father! There is yet a

(4.) Circumstance attending ancient marriages which must by no means be omitted; which was, the bride brought no dowry with her to the bridegroom, but on the contrary the bridegroom himself gave the dowry to her relations, when at the same time she brought nothing but the paraphernalia, which consisted of some presents from her father and near relatives. The practice of hunting fortunes com-

menced in latter times, when luxury, voluptuousness, and dissipation became more prevalent, but was by no means requisite in those days of ancient simplicity. Instead of demanding a fortune with Rachel, Jacob agreed to serve for her the space of seven years; and instead of giving them a portion, Laban exacts with severity upon his son-in-law. In like manner the son of Hamor, enamoured of Dinah, proposes to give, and not receive money with her, "Ask me never so much dowry, and I will give it."

This is perfectly applicable to Christ and his church; he gives, but receives not: he, like Jacob, hath won his bride by servitude; and well might complain that he was made to serve with her sins, not seven only, but three and thirty years, before he could remove every impediment to his taking his betrothed to his embrace. He finds his people destitute of all personal excellency and comeliness, besides what he himself is pleased to put upon them. When we come to Jesus by faith, we are wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, friendless and helpless, cast out to the loathing of our persons, by father and mother forsaken, in point of salvation: yet we, like another Rachel, although made willing to follow him from Haran to Canaan, would treacherously be for carrying our gods with us; and it may be long before we are entirely weaned from the works of mens' hands. Yet notwithstanding he receives nothing along with his spouse but guilt and defilement, such as to purge it required the efflux of his own precious blood; behold what a jointure! what a dowry the heavenly Bridegroom has settled upon his bride! "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

His obedience is made yours for justification, his blood for pardon and sanctification, his grace for support, his house for a dwelling, and the fruits of his Spirit for ornamental attire; all that grace, life, and glory, laid up in him, are settled upon the believer: verily thy lot is cast in pleasant places, and thou hast a goodly heritage. The Father of Christ is thy Father through him; the throne of the Redeemer is the seat of thy rest; his unsearchable riches are thy portion for ever. Let thy hand then put the crown of salvation on his venerable head, which once bowed under

the weight of thine enormities; let his glory be the object of thy pleasurable pursuit, his will the law of thy choice.

These observations made concerning the marriage itself, we shall now proceed to the

II. General head of discourse, which is to speak of the subsequents of the Jewish marriages, and particularly of this of Ruth and Boaz. Under which head, we shall see how far the spiritual things of the gracious kingdom are shadowed forth by the natural institutions amongst men.

(1.) The elders and all the people blessed the bridegroom and bride, in singing the *epithalamium*, or marriage-song, as was customary among the ancients of Israel. Ver. 11. "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel." This was the manner of blessing among Israel: "The Lord bless thee: the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon thee: the Lord make this woman like Rachel and Leah," &c. What honour was here conferred upon this Moabitess! to rank her in this benediction with those two mothers of Israel! but infinitely superior is that honour conferred on the stranger brought into the house of Jesus; she stands at the right hand, and is numbered amongst the honourable of his court. To see the church of God, although the descendants of a guilty and apostate parent, and children of wrath, even as others, by nature, ranked in a station superior to the thrones and dominions of heaven, must astonish every beholder, and clearly shew that their advancement is of grace.

1. But why like Rachel and Leah? because they followed their husband into Canaan from Haran, to the forsaking of their father's house, former connexions, acquaintance, and native customs. In this respect the Lord, by his grace, makes every true convert like Rachel and Leah, willing to forsake all for the sake of the heavenly Bridegroom. Many would go with Christ, if they could but carry their father's house and former connexions along with them, and incorporate his religion with the customs of their country, but have not a heart to part with all for his name's sake. But this is the call: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people

and thy father's house:"* expressed yet in terms less figurative by the heavenly Bridegroom, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The Lord make you, my hearers, like Rachel and Leah, who followed Jacob out of their own into a strange country: the Lord make you to follow Jesus from earth to heaven, for the love you bear to his dear and precious name.

2. But why like Rachel and Leah, rather than Bilhah and Zilpah, for they also followed Jacob from Haran? The answer is plain: Rachel and Leah were the lawfully wedded consorts of the patriarch; the other two were bondmaids. We would never wish for the servile spirit of a slave to attend any that come into the house of Israel: we would always wish to see a spirit of adoption encouraged amongst the people of God. You have probably, my friends, experienced the bitterness of a spirit of bondage: the Lord make you like Rachel and Leah, the truly betrothed of our gracious Patriarch: the Lord set the doors of your prison open, and bless you with a spirit of liberty, that ye may cry, "My Father, my Father, who wast the guide of my youth."

3. Why is Rachel put here before Leah, seeing Leah was the elder both in years, and in the marriage relation? Leah was less beautiful than Rachel, being tender eyed; somewhat like the Jewish dispensation, which was dark and cloudy, the highest of whose privileges were far inferior to the immunities of the church under the Gospel dispensation. Hence, on a comparison of the two dispensations, our blessed Lord represents the least of his true followers, in point of privilege, as greater than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

Rachel was most favoured and beloved, notwithstanding her sterility and long barrenness: her womb being shut up hindered not the fond affection and warmest regard of the patriarchal lover. It is in some measure so with Christ and his Gentile church: for although, with respect to the emanations of everlasting love, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; yet in regard to the visible fruits and effects of this love, the difference is great. The immunities enjoyed by, and blessings long reserved for, the

* Psal. xlv. 10.

Gospel church, are unspeakably great in a comparative view; notwithstanding which superior excellence was intended for her, the Gentile church, like favoured Rachel, was long barren; four thousand years of the world's age were elapsed, ere it pleased God to gather the Gentiles under the shadow of his gracious wings. But when the set time to favour was come, barren Rachel brought forth beloved, renowned Joseph; the Gentile church brought forth that man child, who was a terror to the bloody dragon. The Lord make thee, O believer, like beloved Rachel, precious in the sight of thy husband, and beautiful to every beholding eye!

4. Why like Rachel and Leah rather than like Sarah and Rebekah, who also were the renowned progenitors of Israel? The reason of this is plain: because from them also proceeded the Edomites, who were not of the church visible, but a people unblest and rejected; a people to whom the Almighty shewed no peculiar favour. But the descendants of Rachel and Leah were all of the church visible, and numbered amongst the chosen of the Lord.

The Lord make you and me in this respect like Rachel and Leah, that our seed be numbered amongst the chosen and redeemed of the Lord; and that we ourselves may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple.

The elders and people, having poured out their benevolent blessings upon Ruth, turn the subject upon Boaz the bridegroom; "Do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be thou famous in Bethlehem." Ephratah and Bethlehem are different names for the same city, now the city of Boaz, afterwards the city of David, and, lastly, famous for the nativity of Jesus. Bethlehem signifies *the house of war*, and may have reference to that horrid massacre of the infant martyrs, subsequent to the birth of the Redeemer. Herod, that monster of cruelty, like a bloody dragon, waged war against the infant Saviour, to make sure of whose destruction all the babes of Bethlehem, and its environs, fell victims to his brutal ferocity. Cursed be his wrath, for it was cruel; and his anger, for it was fierce.

But Herod is not the only enemy who has risen up against the Lord and his Anointed; by nature all men are full of wrath against him, as the only way of salvation and life.

Jesus is born into the world a man of strife and contention unto the whole earth; every man's hand is against him, notwithstanding the benevolence of his disposition, and holiness of his whole conduct. In a special manner in Bethlehem, the war upon Satan's kingdom began; that war, the final issue of which is not only decisive victory by the heavenly Christian, but the entire destruction of the powers of darkness. From this mountain the little stone, which destroys the image, was cut without hands; and upon whose top the handful of corn was sown, the fruit of which has shook like Lebanon.

Bethlehem signifies also the *house of bread*, perhaps, because the bread of God, which came down from heaven to be the life of men, was first revealed in that city. Ephratah, intends abundance, or plenty; the house of abundance of bread, which must be true of the city of Jesus, for "in this mountain, the Lord of Hosts hath made for all people a feast of fat things, full of marrow," &c. and his kind invitation is, "Eat, O friends! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" What plenty of every good! what adorable riches and righteousness have poor believers found in him! and O what depths of undecaying comfort do the saints in glory find in him! blessed means by which the soul is brought to live upon the unsearchable riches of Christ. Do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be thou famous in Bethlehem.

If we apply this blessing to Jesus, it will be replied, "He hath done worthily in Ephratah, and is famous in Bethlehem."

He hath done worthily in Ephratah, in the abundance of his goodness, fulfilling the legal covenant as the substitute of perishing and undone man; restoring its lost honour, magnifying the holiness of the precept, and submitting to the severity of the penalty, as deeming it just and righteous. It was worthily done to place himself betwixt the burning mount and his chosen people; to lay his own neck beneath that sword of justice, brandished to cut them down as cumber-ground sinners.—He hath done worthily, in spending his whole life going about doing good to the bodies as well as the souls of men. He thought no fatigue too great; no suffering too intense to pass through, that he might minister relief to his distressed contemporaries: wherever he went, he pointed out the way of life, and dif-

fused blessings all around. It may well be said of him, that no needy sinner ever perished at his gate; for he was eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, and limbs to the maimed: he was all to every suppliant that the most extreme misery could possibly want. He did worthily in Ephratah, in dying in the room and stead of his avowed enemies; and, with his dying breath, to pray for his bloody murderers. This is an instance of unparalleled love, and unbounded beneficence, for which his character will be extolled on the harps of saints and angels to eternity. He hath done worthily in Ephratah.

"Be thou famous in Bethlehem." He is famous in Bethlehem. That famous, that only infant, who being the Heir of all things, having heaven and earth at his command, was content to put up with a manger for his cradle, and with a stable for the place of his nativity; that only babe, whose praises the highest order of heavenly choirists delight to sing, who, notwithstanding, condescended to be brought into the world amongst beasts of drudgery, as oxen and asses. This amazing stoop in Deity, this astonishing condescension of the blessed Immanuel, will render the name Jesus, in the highest degree, famous for infinite ages still to come.

He is that famous infant, who struck terror to the heart of Herod the tyrant, whose dignity tottered at the account even of the history of his birth. This dread it was which instigated him to send forth his murderous ruffians to massacre the hope of Bethlehem. But he is that famous, that awful Judge, whose lips shall at last denounce the definitive and irrevocable sentence against all the persecutors of his person and people: that awful Judge, from whose presence the heavens and earth shall pass away! and to shun whose wrath, the wicked shall seek to hide themselves, were it even in the very depths of hell.

He is that only famous sacrifice appointed by the Almighty to take away the sins of guilty man; that only sacrifice whose virtue and efficacy is for ever; for of none other it is said, "that by once offering up of himself, he hath for ever perfected all that believe." None was ever known upon earth, none in heaven, who was in himself priest, altar, and sacrifice, besides the Son of God. His divine person is the altar; his human nature the sacrifice; and in the union of his two natures, as the adorable God-

man, he is our priest, the high-priest of our mystical Israel. —He is that famous Prophet who spake as never man spake, his very enemies being judges; whose words penetrate the dullest, and enlighten the most ignorant understanding: that famous King, who lives to be a father and fountain of blessing to his people, who levieth no tax upon his subjects, and who is the everlasting terror of all who would make inroads upon their peace and felicity; a famous sanctuary in this house of war, whose precious name is the only refuge known in the palaces of Zion.

In his blood poured forth, is opened that fountain so famous for its transforming quality, its cleansing efficacy, as instantly to wash the scarlet or crimson sinner as white as the fleecy snow; to restore the flesh of the most confirmed leper like that of a tender infant. What numbers of defiled Syrians have here washed and been cleansed! what numbers of blind beggars do daily wash in this pool, and as they wash have their sight restored to them! this famous fountain stands open night and day; it is free to all comers; a sense of pollution makes its virtue necessary to you, and assures you of a welcome; and without a sense of pollution, none could be welcome to come to it, could they even come. No pollution is of too deep a dye, no stains are of too deep a tint for its power to cleanse, for the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin.

Who, like unto our famous Jesus, delights to give power to the faint, and increaseth strength to them who have no might? who, like him, binds up the broken in heart, and becomes the famous rest of the weary? who delights to visit the dungeons where prisoners dwell, or to enter the domains of slavery for the redemption of captives? of whom can it be said, "In him dwelleth all the riches of wisdom and knowledge?" who so extolled for wisdom as this servant of the Lord? what power in heaven, on earth, or in hell, can match with that which bores the jaw of leviathan through with a thorn, and plays with the prince of monsters, as with a bird? and oh! his benevolence surpasseth all description, exceeds the utmost limits of human thought! Gabriel's pencil, or the eloquence of the brightest seraph, would here faulter and egregiously blunder. Those lofty tribes who surround the heavenly throne, the happy recipients of his favour, could say much, but when they have said what

they can, must still leave the description scarcely begun! heaven, with its thousands of tongues, and eternity, with its innumerable ages, will not be adequate to the stupendous, the wonderful task! May it be thy employment, O my soul, to dwell for ever on thy Redeemer's beneficence! this will be heaven for thee sufficiently sublime! Such are his riches never to be counted over! unsearchable in the most proper sense! Exert all thine own powers; call in the assistance of elect angels and men; claim an ever-during existence; let every moment of that existence be employed in counting the Redeemer's riches, and still shall they be left unsearchable! Delightful work for an eternity yet to come, even after numberless ages are rolled away. How inexpressible the bliss of the glorified! how delightful the work of the inhabitants of heaven! through all whose regions the name Jesus shall be famous for ever!

"Let thy house be like the house of Pharez." Why like the house of Pharez, rather than that of Shelah? &c. Because that of Pharez was the first family of the house of Judah, as appears from the chronology of Israel. Pharez was one of the line of Christ's ancestry, and recorded as such by Matthew and Luke, the genealographers of Jesus. But who is this Pharez, thus honoured, thus preferred to his brethren? He is the son of incest, born to Judah by his daughter Tamar, widow of his sons Er and Onan. Surely nothing meritorious or alluring seems to appear in the descent of this Jewish chief, which should induce the great Governor to give him precedence. O how brightly does divine Sovereignty here shine in its radiant beams! how emphatically does it here assert its right! Shall Shelah, lineally descended from lawful embrace, be neglected in the chronology of the Jews; and Pharez, the fruit of a stolen, an incestuous amour, be recorded with honour? What less can we say than that the conduct of God, in a way of grace, is altogether independent on human virtue. It is not to be wondered at, that men of mere natural principles should stumble at conduct so mysterious, and contrary to human maxims.

"Let thy house be like the house of Pharez." Pharez, division, or a breaking forth. There was a time when the house of Jesus was like the birth of Pharez, a breaking forth; it broke forth upon the right hand, and on the left.

The light of the Gospel broke forth from Judea, and darted to the ends of the world; and how low soever the work of God in our day may seem to be, there shall be a season when the house of Jesus shall again be as Pharez, and break forth upon every quarter of infidelity.

> Haste, haste, old time! the tardy moments draw
> Which intervene between me and that day!

Pharez, division, which figures forth the division of Christ's house from the synagogue of Satan, the houses of the world, and dwellings of the wicked. This division began in the family of Adam, and hath continued ever since; and still I may say, ye are not, ye who have known the grace of God, I say ye are not of the world, that world which lies in the wicked one. The same division shall continue to the end, and indeed when time shall be no more, even to all eternity. But though foreign to this benediction, the house of Christ is divided in a regular, and in an irregular manner; in a regular manner, by divine appointment into fathers, young men, and children, which division is profitable to the whole: in an irregular manner, into various opinions, persuasions, and sects, who unbecomingly militate against one another, and who might be of the greatest mutual disservice, according to the natural tendency of those divisions. But such is the wisdom of the great Governor, that those things which in themselves tend to the ruin of the interest, are made subservient to the best purposes, by making them all expert in the knowledge and defence of sacred truth; as the friction of iron upon iron will infallibly brighten both, and in some cases will endue with a magnetic and attractive quality. Thus out of the greatest seeming evil the Lord can, the Lord doth, bring forth good to his church and people, to his cause and interest in general.

2d. Another subsequent of the ancient Jewish marriages was, the bridegroom brought the bride into the marriage chamber, which was called Beth-hillel, *the house of praise;* the time of marriage being in ancient times, as well as modern, a season of festivity and mirth, whatever the consequences of marriage may be in these latter times of voluptuous licentiousness. When Isaac married Rebekah, he brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he loved her, and she became his wife. Here the mate of the son's choice

became successor to the venerable mother. In the case before us, Boaz took Ruth into his house, as appears from the 11th and 13th verses compared.

The heavenly Lover also brought his spouse into his banqueting house, displayed over her the banner of his love, and made her pertake of his richest blessings. His Gentile church was brought into the tent of her Jewish mother, notwithstanding she is of the old olive by nature; yet being now engrafted into the living vine, her privileges and beauty far exceed those of the other. But shall we from hence have one elated thought? God forbid! by the grace of God we are what we are: far from being high-minded, let us fear offending against that goodness and love from which spring all our advantages; and being brought into Sarah's tent, may we by grace walk becoming our dwelling.

Jesus has a marriage chamber, a *Beth-hillel*, into which he brings the soul on the day of espousals, and which upon those occasions is generally *a house of praise.* It is indeed said that there is joy in heaven amongst the holy angels when a sinner repenteth, forsaketh all, and cleaves to Jesus; and much more may there be in the believing church which is so nearly concerned. In a particular manner, it makes the hearts of Gospel ministers rejoice, because therein they behold the travail of the Redeemer's soul, and are satisfied that the pleasure of the Lord prospers in their hands. Every lively experimental member must rejoice to behold poor sinners plucked as brands from the burning; brought out of darkness into marvellous light. Being really a spiritual member of the gracious church below, introduceth the soul into such an affinity and alliance with the triumphant in heaven, as would surpass all human credibility, were it not so plainly testified in Scripture. It would be well if believers could consider themselves as minor heirs of heaven, training up to a meetness to join the enthroned church in glory.

3d. A third subsequent of marriage was, the next day after the celebration of the nuptials, the bridegroom brought forth his bride and presented her unveiled to the guests, which might not be done before; the custom being for her to wear her veil till after the marriage was consummated. This veiling of the damsel prior to her marriage, however it might be designed in providence, is certainly very ex-

pressive and picturesque of the state of Christ's people before their conversion. They are veiled; their relation to Jesus lies concealed from every eye beside that of Omniscience: they lie in the common ruin of the human nature, and cannot be distinguished from the children of the Devil, till grace brings them forth to the light, and makes their adoption manifest by faith and repentance.

But on the day of calling grace, when the trembling soul gives her heart and hand to Jesus, the husband of its choice, the veil that formerly disguised the heir of promise is taken away, and the Bridegroom presents the believer to his church, as the choice of his affection, and purchase of his blood. All glorious within, in virtue of grace infused, or the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and clothed with wrought gold. Now, without a veil, the queen stands at the right hand of the King himself, clothed with the gold of Ophir, and she and the blessed Bridegroom can talk with delight of their reciprocal affection, and rehearse the transactions of their mutual laves: now the Redeemer says, "Thou art all fair my love, there is no spot in thee." And now says the bride, "His mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely; this is my beloved, and this is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem."

If ye, my brethren, are the children of light and of the day, ye are in some manner made manifest. The child of grace is born alive, and will discover itself by its crying; so the bride of Jesus will be known by the ornaments he hath put upon her, and clothed in his own attire he will present her to his friends now, and to his Father blameless in the day of his appearance.

4th. Fruitfulness was the issue of this marriage between Boaz and Ruth. "The Lord gave her conception," says the text. By which it appears, that fruitfulness or conception is the gift of God, intirely dependant on his sovereign will and pleasure; which ought to quiet the minds of those to whom it is denied: had it been duly considered by Rachel, she had never addressed her husband in the unbecoming manner she did, "Give me children, or else I die:" seeing children were not Jacob's gift, but that of his God.

Fruitfulness will always be the result of marriage to Jesus: the bride, the Lamb's wife, is represented as a wo-

man travailing in birth, and bringing into the world a man child, the dread of the dragon, who therefore sought his destruction. And so will every soul united to him, in virtue of that union, be fruitful in every good word and work, bring forth fruit unto holiness, and have his latter end life everlasting: not that you shall be able always to do the things that ye would: on the contrary, you will always find that the flesh shall lust against the spirit, and that when ye would do good, evil is present with you; yea, when you stand before the Lord, that Satan shall stand at your right hand to resist you: but this conflict shall not hinder the fruits of faith: rather shall it tend to promote its fruitfulness and enlargement.

5th. Once more, for I hasten to a conclusion. Perpetual cohabitation is another fruit or subsequent of this marriage relation. Boaz took Ruth into his house, and Jesus takes the espoused soul in his house also; the house of rest and habitation of his holiness. In all her wilderness warfare, and sojourning below, he graciously condescends to visit, and to dwell with her, how black soever the curtains of her tent may be. This is his gracious promise to his believing church, and whilst below, his people may expect his presence. When her warfare is accomplished, when she hath finished her militant course, he will take her to his heavenly kingdom, that she may be ever with the Lord, and behold that glory which he had with the Father before the world began: but as to her happiness and glory when thus taken home, what shall we, what can we say? Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what glories are prepared for those who love the Lord, and who have by grace made choice of Jesus as their only, their all-sufficient Saviour and Redeemer!

DISCOURSE XIV.

A GENERAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE WHOLE.

As the great end of our hearing the Gospel is soul-profit, and as our profiting in a great measure depends in God's ordinary way on the manner in which we hear, it may not be amiss to examine ourselves upon the premises delivered, and see what grounds of encouragement arise out of the

doctrines deduced from the history of Ruth and Boaz. The

First head of improvement I purpose, is examination. Examine yourselves.

1. Whether Moab or Israel is your choice? Whether you delight in the kingdoms of the world, or in the commonwealth of Israel? Whether our hearts are fixed on earth or heaven? This is one of the grand questions to be attended to; a question of the last importance, and which enters into the very state of our soul concerns. Is alienated Moab our choice? then Israel is not: if earth is your delight, there can be no such thing as a desire after heaven in your bosom. It is not difficult to see whether we worship idols or the true God; cannot any one determine whether his heart is running upon riches, pleasures, and honours; or whether these things appear all as vanity, and the heart is set upon higher pleasures? Let these things engage the attention of my hearers now; for there is a day coming, a long expected day of final retribution, when every thing earthly must appear in its own identical emptiness, and nothing shall appear valuable besides the very things which we are now most prone altogether to neglect, or to treat with indifference.

Admitting that everlasting happiness is your concern, and to flee from the wrath to come your supreme desire, ask your own hearts, whether ye are wedded to Jesus or to the legal covenant? There is such a thing as seeking salvation in a way that will never succeed, as it were by the works of the law; or the doing of some good thing with a view to obtain eternal life. That young man in the Gospel who came to Jesus, appears to have been very desirous of eternal life, but he sought it only in the way of doing; "Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" But when he found the way to life unanswerable to his own inclinations, he went away sorrowful, and, for any thing said about him in Scripture, never returned. Orpah also, who wept to part with her mother-in-law, but notwithstanding parted with her, rather than part from her kindred and country. If your hearts are wedded to the legal covenant, and you hope for heaven by your own personal holiness, your disappointment must finally be dreadful; for by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified, all that are under the law being under the curse. How sad then must the state of those be, who being ignorant of God's

righteousness, go about to establish their own works as the grounds of their acceptance, and title to happiness!

If your souls are wedded to the Lord Jesus, and you really do prefer the land of Israel to that of Moab, it may farther be asked, Are you wedded to him only? There are some who would intermix the customs of the two nations: even Rachel was for carrying her gods along with her. There are who would be called by the name of Jesus Christ, yet eat their own bread, and clothe themselves with their own raiment; and there are who would join themselves to both him and Moses; as well as others who would serve both Christ and the world. If you can even say, that you have renounced the legal covenant as the ground of your hope, the customs of the world as the objects of your choice, there is yet a possibility of your being joined to your frames and feelings, as well as to Jesus Christ. It is truly desirable to have an agreeable frame of soul; but this frame is not attainable till you have learned to live above all the changes of your own minds upon Jesus only, and that fulness that is in him. When indeed taught to approach him not as a saint, but to live upon him as a perishing sinner, you may have those frames which are truly evangelical; and leading the life of faith, you shall enjoy the pleasure of believing; which can never be your case, till you yourselves are reduced to your own proper state of nothingness, and Christ is become your all in all.

But farther: if you are married to Jesus only, and have such experience of heart deceitfulness, and the instability of your frames, that you dare place no dependance upon them; permit me to ask you, has your Bridegroom, the beloved of your souls, brought you into his banqueting-house, into the church, the tent of his mother? Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent; Boaz took Ruth into his house; and Jesus brought his spouse into his banqueting-house also. Perhaps you will say, as some do, I must wait the Lord's time; when that comes, I shall be inclined to give up myself to his church. But having the written law of Christ in our hands, it is absurd, and to the last degree enthusiastic, to expect some farther manifestation to induce us to be found in the way of duty. The Lord's time is now: "Now is the accepted time; now

is the day of salvation." If not embraced now, you may never have an opportunity of glorifying Christ in the ordinances of his house.

I knew a dear saint, whose memory will ever be precious to me, who, from a deep sense of her own nothingness and unworthiness, could never prevail with herself to embrace the privileges of God's ordinances; who, when she came to a death-bed, and could even meet death with a smile on her countenance, had nothing that disturbed her (though leaving husband and children, more beloved by her than life itself), but her having neglected to honour Christ in his house and ordinances. Her pathetic lamentations will never cease, at times, to thrill through my heart, till I meet the beloved spirit within the confines of eternity. O, sirs! duty neglected, is sin committed; sin which may one day lie inconceivably heavy upon your hearts, and be the matter of the most bitter lamentation; and whether you may choose to hear and obey, or be offended with me for disturbing your repose, and putting you on thinking, this is one part of my duty which must by no means be neglected.

Now, believers, I would in a particular manner address myself to you concerning the marriage of Jesus with his church. But how sublime the subject! how far surpassing the power of description! how infinitely then must it transcend the feeble efforts of my unequal pen! Christ and his church are the children of one Father, as were Abraham and Sarah: he is the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; she is his daughter, all glorious within; daughter of the Eternal King by adoption and grace. The match determined upon in the paternal purpose, the Father presents his daughter to the intended Bridegroom, who views her with rapturous delight, and in the endearing language of fervent love expresses his approbation of her, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." The approbation of the Bridegroom thus expressed, the Father in council engages for the consent of his daughter, "Thy people shall be a willing people in the day of thy power." This is the betrothment of the church to Jesus, by which she becomes the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

In the gift of his church, the Almighty Father and the co-equal Son enter into solemn covenant upon her account,

On the part of the Father, all grace, glory, and happiness is settled on her as the chosen of the Son for his fulness and glory: on the part of the Son, he engages to use her as his beloved consort; to pay whatever debts she should contract; to bear what sins she should commit; to deliver her from whatever evils she should expose herself unto; and, in all respects, to use her as bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.

Preliminaries thus settled, nothing remained but the celebration of the nuptials, or the becoming one flesh with his people; being already one spirit, or married in the intention of the mind. There being a moral impossibility of the bride assuming the nature of the Bridegroom, he graciously condescends to humble himself, in the assumption of her nature, with all its sinless infirmities. Thus he became man, because bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and thus in open marriage he gave his hand to his betrothed.

But still the consent of the bride is wanting, till the day of divine power, when the Father says to her by his word and Spirit, "Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to have and to hold for better and worse?" Then the soul, renouncing all other lovers, gives her heart and hand unto Jesus only, is become a partaker of the divine nature. Here is now an intermixture of natures; he, as the bridegroom, appears clothed in our nature; and the believer appears as having received, and acting under, the influence of his spirit. Now can the soul survey the unsearchable riches of Christ as legally her own, in virtue of his marriage endowment, and may say, "My Beloved is mine, with all his fulness and glory; and I am his, with all my imperfection and sinfulness:" which leads me to take notice of a few things, which naturally result from this marriage relation, more particularly than has been done in the former discourses.

(1.) A mutual participation of property, naturally and legally results from your relation to the Redeemer. In marriage, all that the husband has becomes the property of the spouse: yes, believer, all that the Lord Jesus has, or is heir unto, is your own property; his righteousness so spotless in itself, and so acceptable to the Father, is all your own; he hath made it over to you in marriage contract. Yours is the efficacy of his atoning blood, which

would be useless with regard to himself, for he never offended: yours is the Spirit of his grace, to lead, to guide you whilst here, and to bring you to his glory, which also is yours. His heaven, his glory, his fulness, and unfathomable depth of comfort, his unsearchable riches, and his God and Father, are all your own. Whatever Jesus is heir unto, you are joined with him in his expectations; if he is heir of all things, ye are heirs of all things through him, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

But, O believer, what an exchange is here! our sole property is sin and wretchedness, and even that he graciously takes off our hand; he freely acknowledges all that is ours, to have become his own, in virtue of his relation to his people: hence, because they were sinners, "he was made sin;" because they were rebels, he died the death; because they had merited stripes, the stripes fell upon him. Good Lord, we have all thy glory and grace, and thou all our guilt and shame! We may well say each of us,

> "O what shall I do my Saviour to praise;
> So good, and so true, so plenteous in grace!"

(2.) A oneness of interest results from this relation; and the longer we live, the more we know of the Christian life, the more we shall see the propriety of this proposition. Our true interest lies in promoting the interest of his gracious kingdom. They mistake exceedingly, who think that believers may have an interest separate from Christ's, or an interest which has no immediate connexion with his manifestative glory: no, my friends, as Christians you can have none, whatever you may have as men in common with others. If ever you pursue profit or pleasure where his interest is not concerned, expect to meet, at one time or other, a lion in your way, and an adder in your path: if you consult his interest, you will be sure to find your account in it; for he will take care of yours, whilst you are endeavouring to pursue that which is obviously to his honour and glory.

On the other hand, his interest as man and Mediator lies in securing the real advantage of his church and people, against all the attacks of hell and sin, of foes without, or lusts within. The reason of this is evident, because the church as such, is his fulness, and his glory. What would a head be, if ever so perfect, without a body? or a sun, if

ever so radiant of itself, without beams? what would a bridegroom be without a spouse? or indeed the Lamb without a wife? In short, nothing can be to the Redeemer's honour, which is not for his church's good in its several members; nothing can be for the good of the church in general, or of individuals in particular, which is not for his honour. If so, I infer

(3.) That here is a ground laid for the certain safety, and undoubted perseverance of every believer in the blessed Jesus.

If it is for the glory of Christ that believers should persevere, they certainly shall; for he will not give his glory to the devil, that head of all antichrists. A loving husband will never suffer his beloved consort to despair in prison for debt, whilst it is both his interest and inclination to deliver her. What should we think of such a brutal, unfeeling husband as a member of society, who would let the wife of his choice perish in a jail, rather than redeem her from the cruelty of her creditor, notwithstanding he had it in the power of his hand to set her at liberty? We should certainly hold him as an execration, and the pest of society, who could act so insensibly to his relation. But our adorable Bridegroom has given the utmost demonstration of his love, in laying down his life for his people, when in a state of enmity against him; and will therefore not leave them to perish when sin has actually become their burden. As thy Husband, O believer, he is the guide of thy youth, the defence of thy person, through all the vicissitudes of life, and in death itself; for thou hast his word for his being with thee for ever, having said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Thy marriage with the Son of God insures thee safety in, and a comfortable issue from death, a welcome admission into the splendid society above, where clothed with gold of Ophir, thou shalt stand at his right hand and behold the excellency of his beauties; for thy very death is precious in his sight.

(4). Many special privileges arise for the present from this desirable alliance, of which the following is a specimen. —You become dependant upon him for all things: from him you derive the food and nourishment of your immortal spirits; only Jesus hath the hidden manna in store to impart; and what he has is become thine own. On him is thy

dependance for clothing and ornament for thy whole person, both for ordinary and extraordinary occasions; the fruits of righteousness which adorn thee before men, are of the operation of his Spirit; and the robe of state in which thou appearest at court, proceeds from his perfect and complete obedience. As your husband and Lord, you are dependant on him for wisdom to direct your steps in the difficult mazes of this wilderness state. He is given as a leader, and to him you are directed to apply for direction: "If any any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God (in Christ), who giveth liberally, and ubraideth not" (our ignorance). Moreover, as the betrothed of his affection, you have the nearest access unto his private affairs, for he does not keep the door of his lips from her that lieth in his bosom, but openeth the secret of his ancient kindness, and sheweth the plenitude and stability of his gracious covenant unto her.

(5.) Behold the dignity to which ye have obtained, O believers! dignity far transcending the station of angels! Your Maker, the Lord of Hosts, is your husband. To what degree of nearness are you brought! to be nearer, is not possible. Thy Maker is thy husband; "bone of thy bone, and flesh of thy flesh," Eph. v. 30. How much, my brethren, are you indebted to free and sovereign grace! See a wretched infant nursed up in the hospitable bosom of everlasting love, dandled on the knee of providence, and married to the King of kings, and Lord of lords! See a condemned criminal freely pardoned, taken into favour, made a courtier of the King of universal nature, and sitting on the bench with the Judge of all worlds, and own salvation by grace alone! But then, let this

(6.) Be our concluding remark. If it is only by the grace of God that we are what we are, under what obligations are we to seek his honour in all we do or say? He calls us away, "Hearken, O daughter, incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and all thy father's house, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." In return for love so vast, for condescension so unspeakable, be ye his; he is your Lord, and worship ye him; let his will be your only law. It behoves the spouse to submit to the mild government of a husband who loves her so entirely. Sarah owned no lord but Abraham; the spouse no beloved but the fair-

est among the sons of men; own ye no authority besides that of your own wedded Lord.

Let it be your pleasure to serve him, for he took delight in saving you, though at the expense of his own precious life; and he loves cheerful obedience and willing submission. If therefore you would honour him, do all things without murmuring; make the peace and prosperity of his house the principal study of your lives; let the language of your conduct, as well as of your lips, be, "peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." Whilst there is a possibility of saying without doing, cautions of this sort can never be unseasonable.

His interest is your interest, his cause your own; as well may the interest of man and wife be divided, as that of Jesus and his church in its individual members. It is altogether vain to set up a personal, or family interest, as separate from that of Christ in his church. It was Ephraim's great sin that his heart was divided, and the fruit he brought forth was to himself. Where God has the person, he will have his heart; where he has the heart, he will also have the hand: ye are not your own, ye have nothing that can be called your own: therefore let Jesus be glorified with what he hath dearly purchased. Let nothing tempt you abroad from his house; dwell in his land, and verily ye shall be fed. If a famine should come upon Canaan, let it not drive you into Egypt, as it did Abraham: he had like to have suffered fatally by his conduct, if God had not mercifully preserved Sarah whilst in the house of Pharoah. Bad as the church at any time may seem to be, it is the land of promise, and therefore ought to be preferred to Egypt. If Dinah's curiosity had not prompted her to visit the daughters of the land, her virgin purity had not been invaded: her example is a suitable warning to all to guard against vain curiosity. Abraham's rebuke in the loss of Sarah should teach us to wait with patient diligence in the house of prayer, even when under the greatest discouragements, for the set time to favour, when God shall again send rain upon the earth, and himself become as the dew unto his Israel.

FINIS.

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